

Not at night



Edited by
CHRISTINE
CAMPBELL
THOMSON

Tales that
freeze the blood

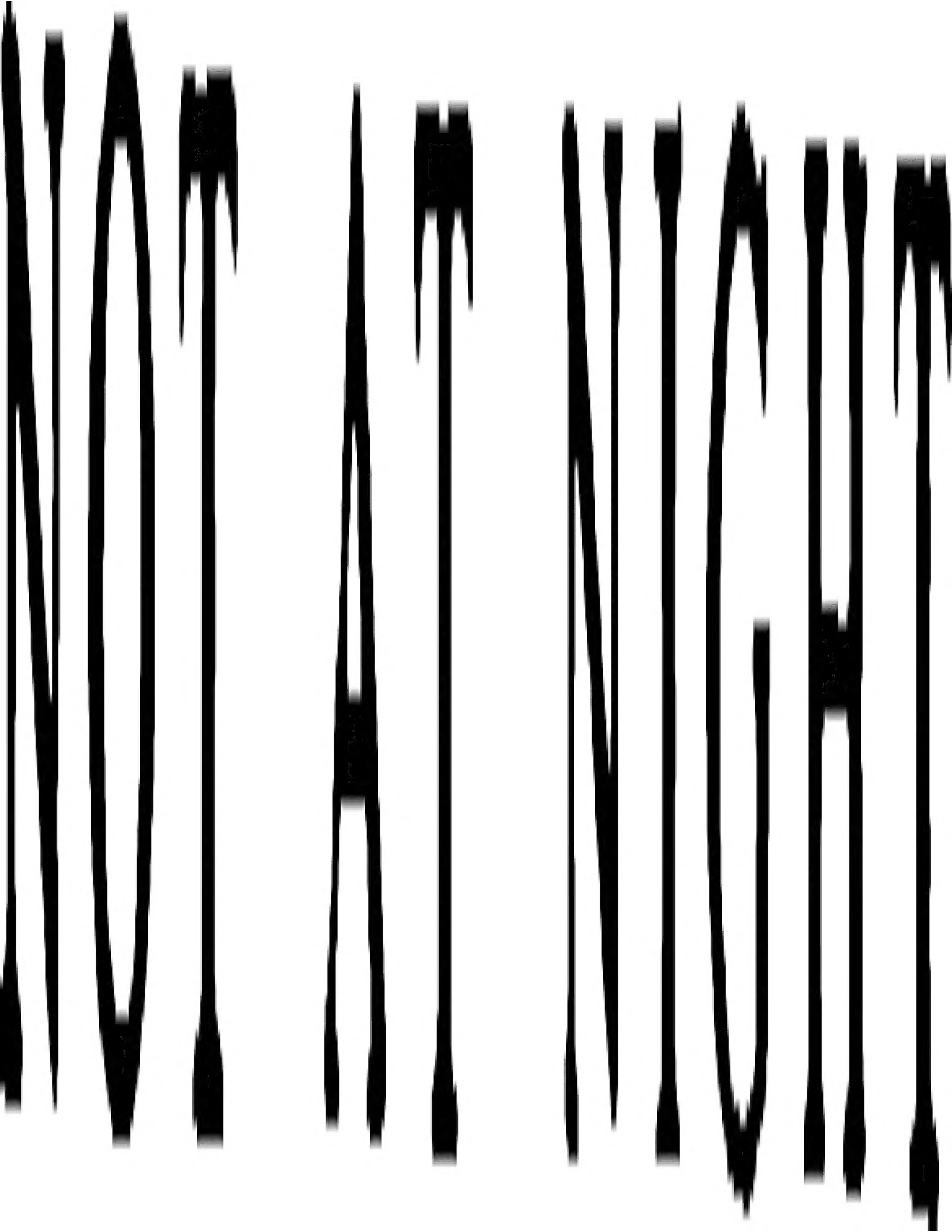


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blood on the stairs, head shrinkers,
Chinese tortures, amputations, snakes
—they are all here !

These stories
will make you
AFRAID



NOT AT NIGHT

Selected and Arranged by

CHRISTINE CAMPBELL THOMSON



ARROW BOOKS

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INTRODUCTION

The 'Not at Night' series was originally conceived by its editor on the top of a bus one evening when it became clear that a money maker was needed for the firm of Selwyn & Blount, the original publishers. It was one of those brilliant ideas that grew and grew over a period of some ten or eleven years ending with an Omnibus volume containing the pick of the stories (in the opinion of the editor) and the War, which put a final end to its existence. During its long and honourable life over a quarter of a million copies were sold and the little 2/- volumes were seen on the stalls of almost every railway station, as well as in the bookshops.

Now the publishers of Arrow Books have had the brilliant idea of staging a 'comeback' with an 'Arrow' Not at Night; the stories in it have again been selected by the original editor, Christine Campbell Thomson, and she confidently believes that they will be as popular now as then. It is illuminating and comforting to find how many stories that might have been considered old-fashioned have stood the test of approximately thirty years—more than a generation—and read as well now as they did then.

In this collection an attempt has been made to cover all types of the stories used from the scientific experimental to the period ghost and the plain horror.

To re-read the old books has been a wonderful and in some ways a sentimental experience akin to having a grandchild and this little volume goes to the world with the belief that the modern readers will be as pleasantly terrified as were those who originally bought each issue.

CHRISTINE CAMPBELL THOMSON

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THE ACCURSED ISLE

MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

LANDERS drove another sliver of shell into the rotting log. The other six men watched with listless eyes, while Clark counted soundlessly.

‘Fifteen,’ he finished aloud. ‘Fifteen days since the liner went down. Lord! We’ve been on this God-forsaken island only two weeks! It seems like fifteen years at least since I had a good square meal. Mm . . . I think I’d give my corner lot in hell for a rare steak . . . with onions,’ he said dreamily. ‘And a pile of French-fried potatoes as high as my head!’

‘Shut up!’ snapped Ellis savagely, scowling at the speaker. ‘Don’t make it worse than it is.’

They huddled together on the white sand, seven men who would find nothing in common back there in New York, but who were wedded together now to cheat their mutual foe—Death. Seven pairs of eyes stared out across the endless expanse of green-blue water to where the sun was just dipping into the sea. Landers glanced about at the group pensively. He had grown to know them well, these companions of his, during those interminable fifteen days. In that mad chaos when the ship went down, the instinct to live had tumbled them into the little lifeboat, and put out from the steamer wallowing heavily in the angry sea. Many were lost, but the rescue freighter that cabled its nearness must have picked up most of the loaded boats. But one remained unaccounted for, Landers pondered bitterly, a boat containing seven men. They had tossed all that terrible night, with Death snatching at them from every towering billow, and when morning came the boat thumped against a jutting knoll of reef—a bare twenty feet wide, but land. They had scrambled joyously from their leaky craft to cling to the knoll,

and as the sun rose higher, the tide receded to reveal a small island about a square mile in area. Floating timbers and dead fish lay upon the sloping beach, and beyond in the soft mud they found a supply of food—oysters. So they waited, drinking sparingly from their two meagre kegs of water and subsisting on the shellfish; confidently at first, then hopefully, then desperately at last.

By day a flag made from their shirts flapped from the peak of the knoll to beckon chance passing ships to the rescue. By night a small signal fire burned, fed cautiously by the drift-wood salvaged from the beach when the tide went out. At the tide's lowest ebb the seven burrowed in the soft mud for shell-fish, which they piled about the signal flag, and when the sea rose to cover all save that little knoll, they clung there together till the tide went out.

But seven men, Landers mused, cannot live indefinitely on the water in two small kegs, with shell-fish as their sole item of diet. The strain was telling on them all, and each marvelled at the other's effort not to show it. Landers stared covertly at each familiar face in the fading light. There was Ogden, a bluff and goodnatured riveter whose winning of a fabulous sum at the big race in Agua Caliente had sent him abroad to satisfy his longing for travel. There was Ellis, sour and petty, an illiterate old Texan whose tiny farm had miraculously spouted oil one day. There was Anderson, likeable but secretive, a boy of nineteen with a hunted look that betrayed something of his reason for leaving America. There was Kenshaw, a quiet and cheerfully courageous man of middle-age, a doctor bound for the Orient to experiment with Mongol fevers. There was Ritters, as short of temper as he was of stature, by his own admission, 'the Big Guy's body-guard'—the Big Guy being the notorious beer baron who had probably escaped in another lifeboat. There was Clark, placid and unmoved in the face of their creeping peril, a globe-trotter with an unquenchable desire to move on and a large enough inheritance to do so. And there was himself, Martin Landers, sent abroad by his firm to straighten out their Paris branch before he could return to—or send for, according to the time needed for adjustment—his wife and little son.

Oh, they all had their cherished little plans, Landers pondered bitterly—plans so effectively smashed when that fire in the liner's hold had broken out. He sighed and tossed a used match to the signal-fire, with a glance of revulsion at the heap of oysters about the signal-flag.

'The night cometh . . . ' murmured Dr. Kenshaw.

'Yeah,' said Ogden. 'Another night.'

'Time to put on the nose-bag,' spoke up the diminutive Ritters bitterly. 'Pass the pocket-knife, Landers.'

Landers tendered the short blade to the speaker. Ritters took it, muttering, and began to pry open one after another of the oyster shells. He tendered one ironically to the doctor. Kenshaw turned his head away with a grimace of repugnance.

'Oh, come, Doctor!' sneered the gunman. 'The sea food at our joint is the best in town!'

Ogden spat disgustedly.

'Better take it, sir' the quiet boy at Kenshaw's left urged. 'Have to eat . . . something, you know.'

The doctor nodded slowly and forced himself to swallow the mollusc, gagging as he did so.

'None for me!' said Ellis vehemently. 'Think I'd rather starve, if it's the same to you.' He glowered at Landers sullenly. Landers returned the look with the dislike of a good sport for a squawker.

'I still think we oughta try for it,' Ellis grumbled. 'We must be just off the track of the steamers, and we're sure to run into one sooner or later. Why stick here on this rotten two-by-four island?'

'You know it would be suicide, Ellis,' Landers said without emotion. 'The boat sprang a slow leak when we hit the reef. But even if we could plug it up, it would mean leaving our food supply. And how can we know how soon a ship—'

'Well, our water supply is gettin' low,' reminded the Texan ominously. 'If we ain't picked up soon . . .'

'Aw, go to sleep,' growled Clark, who was already stretched out on the rocks beyond the tide-line. 'Who's the sentry to-night?'

'I am,' replied Anderson hesitantly. 'First half, that is, and Ogden relieves me!'

'Well, mind you don't go to sleep on us like you did last time,' Ellis turned his ill-feeling on the youth. 'Like as not you let a ship pass.'

The boy's face in the flickering light looked distressed.

'Aw, pipe down!' growled Ogden. 'The kid's a bare nineteen—he couldn't help falling asleep.' He yawned noisily, flopped on the sand and closed his eyes. In a moment he was asleep like a healthy animal.

At length all of them sprawled about the small fire, far enough away to escape its heat in the sultry night, yet near enough to be out of the water when the tide rose. Only Anderson sat up, staring into the dark. There was no sound, save the lapping of the waves on the beach, the intermittent crackle of the fire, the heavy breathing of the sleepers. The boy strained to pierce the blackness ahead, scanned the unseen waters for a glimpse of a passing ship; but only the distant stars met his roving gaze.

The lapping of the waves was infinitely soothing: Anderson nodded, jerked awake and nodded again. He rose once to pile more wood on the dying fire, sat back down and dozed once more. Once a muffled gasping sound startled him from sleep, but he reminded himself that it could be only one of his companions having a nightmare. His head sank slowly upon his chest. The next he knew, Ogden's kindly face bent above him, tolerantly, bidding him to lie down and sleep. The youth curled up where he sat and slept at once.

Excited voices roused him, and some one shaking him violently. His waking thought was that a ship had seen their signal-fire; but Ogden's face bent above him held no elation—a fixed horror.

'It's Ellis!' he rasped. 'He's dead! Something slipped up on him in the night and . . . and tore out his throat,' he finished in a rush of words.

The men were surrounding something that lay just beyond the water's edge in the dim grey light of dawn. Clark whistled soundlessly, looked away. Kenshaw was kneeling, examining the still form for any remaining signs of life.

'He's done for,' he reported quietly. Landers was bending over the body also, and as Kenshaw looked up their eyes met and held significantly.

'Some sea-monster, I guess,' the doctor added rapidly. 'Anybody here know the funeral service?'

No one did.

'Well, we'll have to bury him anyway—out here.' He gestured towards the open sea. 'Some of you bail out the boat so we can row out a piece.'

When they rowed back from the makeshift burial at sea, the little island had grown. They made the boat fast and threw themselves on the wet sand. No one spoke. They merely sat there, silent and shaken, until the tide ebbed. The task of gathering driftwood and delving for oysters broke the spell at last however, and they spoke again in natural tones.

The day crept by at a maddening pace and it was night again.

'My watch isn't it?' Landers spoke, driving another sliver of shell into the log. 'Clark, you're my relief.' Clark nodded, swallowing an oyster with a wry face.

They curled up at last and slept. Landers squatted beside the fire, staring out into the dark and praying in his unpractised way for that precious blaze of light that would be a rocket from a passing ship. Once he thought he heard a movement behind him in the darkness. He tried to peer into the engulfing shadow beyond the aura from the fire. A swishing sound came from the other side of the island.

Landers stood up and took a step in that direction, but there was nothing to see, and the sound did not come again. He sat down heavily with a shrug of his square shoulders.

'Couldn't have been,' he muttered half aloud. 'I'm crazy . . . but Kenshaw noticed it too . . . aw, we're both crazy . . .'

Landers had learned to mark the hour by the creeping of the tide up the sloping beach.

He stood up, yawning, and advanced to the group lying as far as possible from the fire—for the night was stifling. He checked off the sleepers. Kenshaw—Ogden—Anderson—Ritters—Ellis? He caught himself glancing out to sea and laughed nervously. Clark . . . but where was Clark? Landers went over the group again, but Clark was not among them.

'Clark!' Landers called softly. Then when the call smote upon silence, 'Clark!' he called more loudly. There was no

answer. He raised his voice to a shout. The sleepers mumbled softly and sat up, one by one.

'What the devil!' grumbled Ogden. 'Can't you waken him without gettin' the rest of us up?'

Lander's face in the firelight looked strained. Again he met Kenshaw's eye queerly. 'He's not here. I can't make him hear me . . . Oh, Clark!' he bellowed loudly. But there was no reply.

'Do you suppose . . .?' breathed Anderson, and stopped. But they knew what he had meant to say.

'I don't know,' muttered the doctor. 'Landers, light a stick of wood. We'll search the island . . .'

They found him, not far from the fire. His glassy eyes gleamed in the torchlight and his throat was horrible to see.

'It got him, too,' breathed Ritters. 'What if it . . .'

'Has anybody a gun?' asked Kenshaw quietly. Once more his eyes met Landers', but he glanced away quickly. 'This simply means whoever keeps watch will have to be armed . . . and keep a close guard on the sleepers.'

But no one had a gun. There was no weapon at all, it seemed, except the short pocket-knife they used to open the oysters.

They buried Clark as they had done Ellis before him. The round of sentries had to be rearranged now, with those two missing. Ogden and the doctor were chosen after a short dispute, and another night was marked on Landers' log-calendar with a bit of shell.

Ogden huddled beside the fire, armed with the pocket-knife, eyes straining to pierce the darkness beyond the firelight. At every small stir made by the sleepers he would start violently and glance this way and that in apprehension. Once he started to cry out, for he thought he saw something move among the sleeping forms a few yards away. But it was only one of his companions who had stood up and was moving slowly towards the fire. Ogden turned his head and stared again into the darkness out to sea, begrudging any moment he was not on the lookout for a passing ship. At that moment something tight and strong clutched his throat. The sentry tried to cry out, but only an inarticulate gurgle issued from his mouth. He was thrown

violently on the cold sand . . . and then spinning lights and darkness fell upon him.

Kenshaw, rising at dawn, found him limp beside the dead fire, throat hideously mangled as Ellis's and Clark's had been. He woke the remaining three men, face very white, eyes wide with a fixed horror that seemed incongruous in a doctor—who knows all man can know of death.

'Landers,' he spoke in a hushed whisper. 'No sea-monster killed Ogden. Look! Look at those bruises on his neck!' He pointed a shaking finger at the thing on the sand, and expelled a shuddering sigh.

Landers met his eye sharply, and nodded.

'I noticed it before,' he said quietly, 'and you did too. But I thought I must be mad'

Kenshaw stared at the signal flag unseeingly. 'I should have told him. But I thought unless we were very sure . . . it was a horrible thing to say.'

'What . . . What is it?' chattered the youth, Anderson, glancing nervously from the doctor's face to Landers. 'What about the bruises?'

'Fingers,' said Landers abruptly. 'A man's fingers. And his throat . . . ' he brought out with a great effort—'human teeth!'

'Savages?' croaked Anderson, sickly green of face.

'We all know,' Landers spoke tonelessly, 'that there is no living thing on this island but ourselves.' He paused and drew a deep breath. '*It was one of us!*'

Kenshaw gave a shuddering sigh and turned his eyes out to the open sea. Anderson could only stare frozenly at the speaker. Ritter snorted.

'You're crazy,' he said with vehemence. 'One of us? Which one? Me, I guess.' He laughed shortly. 'I've knocked off many a guy,' he told them grimly after a silence, 'but not that way'

'No, no,' Anderson found his voice at last in an hysterical bleat. 'No man could do that it's It's too horrible to think about.'

'No man in his right mind, son,' the doctor spoke gently. 'But hunger, the insatiable longing for food for meat—and monotony, and death staring him in the face, can do awful

things to a man's reason. The ancients called it "possession"—they'd say a demon entered one of our bodies and forced it to do things we could never in our senses do. We would call it—I hardly know what. Cannibalism . . . homicidal mania accompanied by loss of memory. The seizure seems to come on after nightfall—it's a queer case—but whoever does it doesn't remember anything about it when he . . . after it's over.'

'But . . . It's hideous!' Anderson's eyes were dilated with horror. 'It may be . . . *me*.' He began to sob suddenly like a terrified child. 'What can we do? What can we do?' he wailed.

'Steady, son.' Kenshaw laid a gentle hand on the boy's shoulder. 'Don't let it get you—don't think about it or we'll . . . we'll all go mad,' he jerked out. 'We must just . . . watch one another . . . every minute.'

There was no dispute as to sentry duty that night. No one thought of sleeping. They sat in a group about the fire, in strained silence, each cold with fear of what one of them might suddenly become—of what he himself might become. Ritters produced a pair of dice, forgotten since the wreck, and they gambled for pebbles, in desperation for something to keep them from thinking.

It must have been about midnight that the ship passed. They saw its light, and began yelling wildly, piling more wood on the signal fire, trying to beat out a code message with two stones. But the ship passed on without heeding them. They ran about the island frantically then, weeping and cursing . . . until Kenshaw's low cry brought them to their senses again. He was pointing to something that lay in the water at the island's far edge.

'Anderson,' he groaned. 'Poor kid!' The remaining three men stared at each other woodenly. 'Did anyone . . . watch me the whole time?' the doctor demanded.

Landers and Ritters shook their heads. In the frenzied excitement of the ship's passing, they had each forgotten the horror that hung over them like a dark cloud. And then suddenly Landers pointed to a dark spot on Ritters' soiled shirt-front. Kenshaw leaped forward and grasped the gunman by the arm. The small man turned deathly white.

'You . . . you mean . . . it was *me!*' choked Ritters. 'How . . . how . . .'

Landers grasped his other arm and indicated the stained shirt in grim triumph. 'Blood on your shirt, Ritters. It's the first trace that has been left . . . after . . . You got it there when you . . . Anderson,' he mercifully left the words unsaid.

'Naw!' Ritters whispered desperately. 'That ain't how I got it there! Look! I scratched my chest carrying wood to the fire . . . aw, hey, you can't think that I . . .'

'We can't take the chance, man,' Landers said firmly. 'We're going to tie you up till a ship comes.' Ritters stared at them sickly. 'Don't take it so. You didn't know. Couldn't help it. You're a sick man . . .'

They trussed him hand and foot with their belts and bound him to a jutting bit of reef despite his pleas. And that night they slept without fear.

But morning brought a torrent of deeper horror than before rushing upon them. Ritters bound and helpless as a baby was the fifth victim. Like the rest, he stared glassily at the sky, throat mangled as by the fangs of a wolf.

Landers met the doctor's frozen gaze grimly. 'Well, Kenshaw,' he spoke without inflection, 'it's between us now.'

Horror blazed in the doctor's eyes. 'It's unthinkable . . .' he muttered. 'One of us. You . . . *or me.*' His lips twitched violently.

'Steady!' Landers gripped his arm hard. 'Don't let it get you, doc. There is still another possibility—someone else hidden on the island in some cave we haven't found.' But both men knew that when the tide came in, any living creature that was on the island must crouch with them on the small rise or drown.

The day seemed winged, so much did they dread the coming of night. As the tide receded, they went about their task of gathering driftwood and digging for oysters. They talked incessantly, as though they feared the silence that swooped upon them when they ceased speaking. And as the sun sank below the horizon, the two survivors began to watch each other with increasing nervousness.

'I'll take this load of wood to the knoll.' The Doctor spoke

with studied calm, squinting at the rim of sun above the sea-line. 'Shall I open the oysters?' Landers nodded and handed him the pocket-knife.

What happened next was too quickly done for the eye to follow. With a quick snake-like gesture, Kenshaw slashed his left wrist well to the bone, transferred the blade and slashed his right wrist in like manner. Landers sprang forward with a cry, but his companion smiled stonily and waved him back. Blood spurted from the gashes over the doctor's muscular hands—hands so skilful at the staunching of blood—and dripped upon the white sand where he stood.

'I couldn't stand it, old man—I'm sorry,' he spoke quietly, and as Landers began to rip his soiled handkerchief into strips: 'No, no! Don't try to staunch it—it wouldn't do any good. I've severed the arteries. It was the most painless way out.'

Landers passed a shaking hand over his moist forehead. 'How could you do a thing like that, Kenshaw?' he groaned. 'There must be some other way out . . .'

Dr. Kenshaw shook his head gravely. 'This is the only way, Landers. You see that I know.' He was breathing hard as blood pumped from the gashes at every beat of his heart. He sank to the sand weakly, a bitter little smile curving his lips. 'I couldn't stand to know,' he gasped, 'and we'd have found out sooner or later . . . One of us . . . would know. And,' he sank upon his back, unable to support himself longer—'I couldn't take knowledge into eternity with me, Landers. I'd rather die—not knowing . . . couldn't stand to know . . . I was . . . the . . . last . . . man . . .'

His voice trailed to a weak whisper, died away.

A familiar sound rose suddenly from the silence. Landers stood frozen with incredulity for a moment. Then he whipped about and stared out to sea. In the dim twilight the clumsy form of a freighter was passing close to the island. Landers forgot the dying man, forgot everything in that instant of insane joy. He lit the signal-fire quickly and piled it high with wood, that the scorching sun had dried. He waved his arms and screamed frantically; snatched up the flag and waved it aloft, waded waist-deep into the sea in foolish

anxiety. But the ship had sighted their white flag and already a boat was putting out from her towards the island.

Landers stumbled back to the doctor's side, sobbing with relief. He lifted the prone figure and shook Kenshaw violently, shouting the miracle over and over again. But Dr. Kenshaw could not hear. The open knife was still clutched in his left hand.

As the truth became apparent, a slow horror crept over Landers, chilling him to the soul. In that one madly joyous moment of seeing the rescue ship he had forgotten something—something that swept over him now like an icy tide.

One of them—himself or the dead man at his feet—had hideously murdered five men, had torn out the throats of his five companions like a ravening beast. One of them—but which one? *Which one?*

Landers passed a trembling hand over his eyes. An impulse seized him to shout a warning to that approaching boat, to scream at them to go back and leave him there to die.

But suppose it was Kenshaw, lying now in a pool of his own blood shed in retribution for those five unthinkable crimes? Then he, Landers, had a right to go back and live amongst men. But . . . suppose it was *not* the doctor? Suppose he, Martin Landers, had sated his craving for meat by hideously slaughtering those five men? He thought of the coming night on board the rescue freighter. He saw in imagination a stark figure—perhaps even one of those cheerfully waving men in the approaching boat—stretched out on a bloody deck, his throat mangled as if by the teeth of a savage beast.

For there was no way he could be sure this madness would leave him—if, indeed, *he* was the man-monster—after he had left this accursed island. And home again, with an open door leading to little Marty's crib, to Helen's bed beside it . . . Landers groaned aloud. And even if those terrible seizures came upon him no more—*there were still Ellis—Clark—Ogden—Anderson—Ritters.*

Once more he glanced at the lifeless form at his feet. Yes, Kenshaw had taken the only way out. In any event the doctor would have been killed or left with the mute evidence of a sixth mangled corpse—and either way death was the

only answer. If only he had stayed the knife-blow a few moments longer until the freighter blew her signal of rescue! But no—the fact would still have remained that one of them—one of them—Yet if the madness returned, they would have caught the maniac on the ship, chained him like the wild thing he was, and the other man could have gone free. But now . . .

Landers stared dully at the oncoming boat. He could see the men's faces now, smiling encouragement, could hear their yells of reassurance. A bleak smile twisted his mouth.

'I'm the last man,' he said aloud. 'The last of seven.' Cowardly of Kenshaw to leave him with that black question hanging over his head! It came to him clearly like a sentence of death that he could never know . . . unless at the cost of another poor devil's life. Landers bent slowly, loosened the pocket-knife from Kenshaw's limp fingers.

'Ahoy, mate!' shouted a man standing in the prow of the lifeboat. 'We're a-comin'!'

Landers did not return the greeting. He tested the discoloured blade in his hand with a calloused thumb. It was not very sharp, but sharp enough . . .

FOUR WOODEN STAKES

VICTOR ROMAN

THERE it lay on the desk in front of me, that missive so simple in wording, yet so perplexing, so urgent in tone.

Jack, Come at once for old time's sake. Am all alone.

Will explain upon arrival. Remson.

Having spent the past three weeks in bringing to a successful termination a case that had puzzled the police and two of the best detective agencies in the city, I decided I was entitled to a rest, so I ordered two suitcases packed and went in search of a time-table. It was several years since I had seen Remson Holroyd; in fact I had not seen him since we had matriculated from college together. I was curious to know how he was getting along, to say nothing of the little diversion he promised me in the way of a mystery.

The following afternoon found me standing on the platform of the little town of Charing, a village of about fifteen hundred souls. Remson's place was about ten miles from there so I stepped forward to the driver of a shay and asked if he would kindly take me to the Holroyd estate. He clasped his hands in what seemed a silent prayer, shuddered slightly, then looked at me with an air of wonder, mingled with suspicion.

'I don't know what ye wants to go out there for, stranger, but if ye'll take the advice o' a God-fearing man, ye'll turn back whence ye come from. There be some mighty fearful tales concernin' that place floatin' around, and more'n one tramp's been found near there so weak from loss of blood and fear he could hardly crawl. They's somethin' there. Be it man or beast I don't know, but as fer me, I wouldn't drive ye out there for a hundred dollars cash.'

This was not at all encouraging, but I was not to be influenced by the talk of a superstitious old gossip, so I

cast about for a less impressionable rustic who would undertake the trip to earn the ample reward I promised at the end of my ride. To my chagrin, they all acted like the first; some crossed themselves fervently, while others gave me one wild look and ran, as if I were in alliance with the devil.

By now my curiosity was thoroughly aroused, and I was determined to see the thing through to a finish if it cost me my life. So, casting a last, contemptuous look upon those poor souls, I stepped out briskly in the direction pointed out to me. However, I had gone but a scant two miles when the weight of the suit-cases began to tell, and I slackened pace considerably.

The sun was just disappearing beneath the treetops when I caught my first glimpse of the old homestead, now deserted but for its one occupant. Time and the elements had laid heavy hands upon it, for there was hardly a window that could boast its full quota of panes, while the shutters banged and creaked with a noise dismal enough to daunt even the strong of heart.

About one hundred yards back I discerned a small building built of grey stone, pieces of which seemed to be lying all around it, partly covered by the dense growth of vegetation that overran the entire countryside. On closer observation I realised that the building was a crypt, while what I had taken to be pieces of the material scattered around were really tombstones. Evidently this was the family burying ground. But why had certain members been interred in a mausoleum while the remainder of the family had been buried in the ground in the usual manner?

Having observed thus much, I turned my steps towards the house, for I had no intention of spending the night with naught but the dead for company. Indeed, I began to realise just why those simple country folk had refused to aid me, and a hesitant doubt began to assert itself as to the expedience of my being here, when I might have been at the shore or at the country club enjoying life to the full.

By now the sun had completely slid from view, and in the semi-darkness the place presented an even drearier aspect than before. With a great display of bravado I stepped upon

the veranda, slammed my suitcases upon a seat very much the worse for wear, and pulled lustily at the knob.

Peal after peal reverberated through the house, echoing and re-echoing from room to room, till the whole structure rang. Then all was still once more, save for the sighing of the wind and the creaking of the shutters.

A few minutes passed, and the sound of footsteps approaching the door reached my ears. Another interval, and the door was cautiously opened a few inches, while a head shrouded by the darkness scrutinised me closely. Then the door was flung wide, and Remson (I hardly knew him, so changed was he) rushed forward and throwing his arms around me thanked me again and again for heeding his plea, till I thought he would go into hysterics.

I begged him to brace up, and the sound of my voice seemed to help him, for he apologised rather shamefacedly for his discourtesy and led the way along the wide hall. There was a fire blazing merrily away in the sitting room, and after partaking generously of a repast, for I was famished after my long walk, I was seated in front of it, facing Remson and waiting to hear his story.

'Jack,' he began, 'I'll start at the beginning and try and give you the facts in their proper sequence. Five years ago my family circle consisted of five persons; my grandfather, my father, two brothers and myself, the baby of the family. My mother died, you know, when I was a baby. Now . . .'

His voice broke and for a moment he was unable to continue.

'There's only myself left,' he went on, 'and so help me God, I'm going too, unless you can solve this damnable mystery that hovers over this house, and put an end to that something which took my kin and is gradually taking me.

'Grandad was the first to go. He spent the last few years of his life in South America. Just before leaving there he was attacked while asleep by one of those huge bats. Next morning he was so weak that he couldn't walk. That awful thing had sucked his life blood away. He arrived here, but was sickly until his death a few weeks later. The doctors couldn't agree as to the cause of death, so they laid it to old age and let it go at that. But I knew better. It was his experience in

the south that had done for him. In his will he asked that a crypt be built immediately and his body interred therein. His wish was carried out, and his remains lie in that little grey vault that you may have noticed if you cut around behind the house. Then my dad began failing and just pined away until he died. What puzzled the doctors was the fact that right up until the end he consumed enough food to sustain three men, yet he was so weak he lacked the strength to drag his legs over the floor. He was buried, or rather interred, with grandad. The same symptoms were in evidence in the cases of George and Fred. They are both lying in the vault. And now, Jack, I'm going, too, for of late my appetite has increased to alarming proportions, yet I am as weak as a kitten.'

'Nonsense!' I chided. 'We'll just leave this place for a while and take a trip somewhere, and when you return you'll laugh at your fears. It's all a case of overwrought nerves, and there is certainly nothing strange about the deaths you speak of. Probably due to some hereditary disease. More than one family has passed out in a hurry just on that account.'

'Jack, I only wish I could think so, but somehow I know better. And as for leaving here, I just can't. Understand, I hate the place; I loathe it, but I can't get away. There is a morbid fascination about the place which holds me. If you want to be a real friend, just stay with me for a couple of days and if you don't find anything, I'm sure the sight of you and the sound of your voice will do wonders for me.'

I agreed to do my best, although I was hard put to it to keep from smiling at his fears, so apparently groundless were they. We talked on other subjects for several hours, then I proposed bed, saying that I was very tired after my journey and subsequent walk. Remson showed me to my room, and after seeing that everything was as comfortable as possible, he bade me goodnight.

As he turned to leave the room the flickering light from the lamp fell on his neck and I noticed two small punctures in the skin. I questioned him regarding them, but he replied that he must have beheaded a pimple and that he hadn't

noticed them before. He again said good night and left the room.

I undressed and tumbled into bed. During the night I was conscious of an overpowering feeling of suffocation—as if some great burden was lying on my chest which I could not dislodge; and in the morning when I awoke, I experienced a curious sensation of weakness. I arose, not without an effort, and began divesting myself of my sleeping suit.

As I folded the jacket, I noticed a thin line of blood on the collar. I felt my neck, a terrible fear overwhelming me. It pained slightly at the touch. I rushed to examine it in the mirror. Two tiny dots rimmed with blood—my blood—and on my neck! No longer did I chuckle at Remson's fears, for *it*, the thing, had attacked me as I slept!

I dressed as quickly as my condition would permit and went downstairs, thinking to find my friend there. He was not about, so I looked about outside, but he was not in evidence. There was but one answer to the question. He had not yet risen. It was nine o'clock, so I resolved to awaken him.

Not knowing which room he occupied, I entered one after another in a fruitless search. They were all in various stages of disorder, and the thick coating of dust on the furniture showed that they had been untenanted for some time. At last, in a bedroom on the north side of the third floor, I found him

He was lying spread-eagle fashion across the bed, still in his pyjamas, and as I leaned forward to shake him, my eyes fell on two drops of blood, splattered on the coverlet. I crushed back a wild desire to scream and shook Remson rather roughly. His head rolled to one side, and the hellish perforations on his throat showed up vividly. They looked fresh and raw, and had increased to much greater dimensions. I shook him with increased vigour, and at last he opened his eyes stupidly and looked around. Then, seeing me, he said in a voice loaded with anguish, resignation and despair:

'It's been here again, Jack. I can't hold out much longer. May God take my soul when I go.'

So saying, he fell back again from sheer weakness. I left him and went about preparing myself some breakfast. I

thought it best not to destroy his faith in me by telling him that I, too, had suffered at the hands of his persecutor.

A walk brought me some peace of mind if not a solution, and when I returned about noon to the big house, Remson was up and about. Together we prepared a really excellent meal. I was hungry and did justice to my share; but after I had finished my friend continued eating until I thought he must either disgorge or burst. Then after putting things to rights, we strolled about the long hall, looking at the oil paintings, many of which were very valuable.

At one end of the hall I discovered a portrait of an old gentleman, evidently a Beau Brummel of his day. He wore his hair in the long, flowing fashion adopted by the old school and sported a carefully trimmed moustache and Vandyke beard. Remson noticed my interest in the painting and came forward.

'I don't wonder that picture holds your interest, Jack. It has a great fascination for me, also. At times I sit for hours, studying the expression on that face. I sometimes think that he has something to tell me, but of course that's all tommy rot. But I beg your pardon, I haven't introduced the old gent yet, have I? This is my grandad. He was a great old boy in his day, and he might be living yet but for that cursed blood-sucker. Perhaps it is such a creature that is doing for me; what do you think? '

'I wouldn't like to venture an opinion, Remson, but unless I'm badly mistaken we must dig deeper for an explanation. We'll know tonight, however. You retire as usual and I'll keep a close watch and we'll solve the riddle or die in the attempt.'

Remson said not a word but silently extended his hand. I clasped it in a firm embrace and in each other's eyes we read complete understanding. To change the trend of thought I questioned him on the servant problem.

'I've tried time and again to get servants that would stay,' he replied. 'But about the third day they would begin acting queer, and the first thing I'd know, they'd have skipped, bag and baggage.'

That night I accompanied my friend to his room and remained until he had disrobed and was ready to retire.

Several of the window panes were cracked and one was entirely missing. I suggested boarding up the aperture, but he declined, saying that he rather enjoyed the night air, so I dropped the matter.

As it was still early, I sat by the fire in the sitting room and read for an hour or two. I confess that there were many times when my mind wandered from the printed page before me and chills raced up and down my spine as some new sound was borne to my ears. The wind had risen, and was whistling through the trees with a peculiar whining sound. The creaking of the shutters tended to further the eerie effect, and in the distance could be heard the hooting of numerous owls, mingled with the cries of miscellaneous night fowl and other nocturnal creatures.

As I ascended the two flights of steps, the candle in my hand casting grotesque shadows on the walls and ceiling, I had little liking for my job. Many times in the course of duty I had been called upon to display courage, but it took more than mere courage to keep me going now.

I extinguished the candle and crept forward to Remson's room, the door of which was closed. Being careful to make no noise I knelt and looked in at the keyhole. It afforded me a clear view of the bed and two of the windows in the opposite wall. Gradually my eye became accustomed to the darkness and I noticed a faint reddish glow outside one of the windows. It apparently emanated from nowhere. Hundreds of little specks danced and whirled in the spot of light, and as I watched them, fascinated, they seemed to take on the form of a human face. The features were masculine, as was also the arrangement of the hair. Then the mysterious glow disappeared.

So great had the strain been on me that I was wet from perspiration, although the night was quite cool. For a moment I was undecided whether to enter the room or to stay where I was and use the keyhole as a means of observation. I concluded that to remain where I was would be the better plan, so I once more placed my eye to the hole.

Immediately my attention was drawn to something moving where the light had been. At first, owing to the poor light,

I was unable to distinguish the general outline and form of the thing; then I saw. It was a man's head.

I will swear it was the exact reproduction of that picture I had seen in the hall that very morning. But, oh, the difference in expression! The lips were drawn back in a snarl, disclosing two sets of pearly white teeth, the canines overdeveloped and remarkably sharp. The eyes, an emerald green in colour, stared in a look of consuming hate. The hair was sadly disarranged while on the beard was a large clot of what seemed to be congealed blood.

I noticed thus much, then the head melted from my sight and I transferred my attention to a great bat that circled round and round, his huge wings beating a tattoo on the glass. Finally he circled round the broken pane and flew straight through the hole made by the missing glass. For a few moments he was shut off from my view, then he reappeared and began circling round my friend, who lay sound asleep, blissfully ignorant of all that was occurring. Nearer and nearer it drew, then swooped down and fastened itself on Remson's throat, just over the jugular vein.

At this I rushed into the room and made a wild dash for the thing that had come night after night to gorge itself on my friend, but to no avail. It flew out of the window and away, and I turned my attention to the sleeper.

'Remson, old man, get up.'

He sat up like a shot. 'What's the matter, Jack? Has it been here?'

'Never mind just now,' I replied. 'Just dress as hurriedly as possible. We have a little work before us this evening.'

He glanced questioningly towards me, but followed my command without argument. I turned and cast my eye about the room for a suitable weapon. There was a stout stick lying in the corner and I made toward it.

'Jack!'

I wheeled about.

'What is it? Damn it, haven't you any sense, almost scaring a man to death?'

He pointed a shaking finger towards the window.

'There! I swear I saw him. It was my grandad, but oh, how disfigured!'

He threw himself upon the bed and began sobbing. The shock had completely unnerved him.

'Forgive me, old man,' I pleaded, 'I was too quick. Pull yourself together and we may get to the bottom of things tonight, yet.'

I handed him my flask. He took a generous swallow and squared up. When he had finished dressing we left the house. There was no moon out, and it was pitch dark.

I led the way, and soon we came to within ten yards of the little grey crypt. I stationed Remson behind a tree with instructions to just use his eyes, and I took up my stand on the other side of the vault, after making sure that the door into it was closed and locked. For the greater part of an hour we waited without results, and I was about ready to call it off when I perceived a white figure flitting between the trees about fifty yards off.

Slowly it advanced, straight towards us, and as it drew closer I looked not *at* it, but *through* it. The wind was blowing strongly, yet not a fold in the long shroud quivered. Just outside the vault it paused and looked around. Even knowing as I did about what to expect, it came as a decided shock when I looked into the eyes of the old Holroyd, deceased these past five years. I heard a gasp and knew that Remson had seen, too, and had recognised. Then the spirit, ghost, or whatever it was, passed into the crypt through the crack between the door and the jamb, a space not one-sixteenth of an inch wide.

As it disappeared, Remson came running forward, his face wholly drawn of colour.

'What was it, Jack? What was it? I know it resembled grandad, but it couldn't have been he. He's been dead five years.'

'Let's go back to the house,' I answered, 'and I'll do my best to explain things to the best of my ability. I may be wrong, of course, but it won't hurt to try my remedy. Remson, what we are up against, is a vampire. Not the female species usually spoken of today, but the real thing. I noticed you had an old edition of the Encyclopaedia on your shelf. If you'll bring me volume XXIV I'll be able to explain more fully the meaning of the word.'

He left the room and returned, carrying the desired book. Turning to page 52, I read—

Vampire. A term apparently of Servian origin originally applied in Eastern Europe to blood-sucking ghosts, but in modern usage transferred to one or more species of blood-sucking bats inhabiting South America . . . In the first-mentioned meaning a vampire is usually supposed to be the soul of a dead man which quits the buried body by night to suck the blood of living persons. Hence, when the vampire's grave is opened his corpse is found to be fresh and rosy from the blood thus absorbed . . . They are accredited with the power of assuming any form they may so desire, and often fly about as specks of dust, pieces of down or straw, etc. . . . To put an end to his ravages, a stake is driven through him, or his head cut off, or his heart torn out, or boiling water and vinegar poured over the grave . . . The persons who turn vampires are wizards, witches, suicides and those who have come to a violent end. Also, the death of any one resulting from these vampires will cause that person to join their hellish throng . . . See Calumet's 'Dissertation on the Vampires of Hungary'.

I looked at Remson. He was staring straight into the fire. I knew that he realised the task before us and was steeling himself to it. Then he turned to me.

'Jack, we'll wait till morning.'

That was all. I understood and he knew. There we sat, each struggling with his own thoughts, until the first faint glimmers of light came struggling through the trees and warned us of approaching dawn.

Remson left to fetch a sledge hammer and a large knife with its edge honed to a razorlike keenness. I busied myself making four wooden stakes, shaped like wedges. He returned, bearing the horrible tools, and we struck out towards the crypt. We walked rapidly, for had either of us hesitated an instant I verily believe both would have fled incontinently. However, our duty lay clearly before us. Remson unlocked the door and swung it outwards. With a prayer on our lips we entered.

As if by mutual understanding, we both turned to the coffin on our left. It belonged to the grandfather. We unplaced the lid, and there lay the old Holroyd. He appeared to be sleeping. His face was full of colour, and he had none of the stiffness of death. The hair was matted, the moustache untrimmed, and on the beard were matted stains of a dull brownish hue.

But it was his eyes that attracted me. They were greenish, and they glowed with an expression of fiendish malevolence such as I had never seen before. The look of baffled rage on the face might well have adorned the features of the devil in his hell.

Remson swayed and would have fallen, but I forced some whisky down his throat and he took a grip on himself. He placed one of the stakes directly over its heart, then shut his eyes and prayed that the good God above take this soul that was to be delivered to Him.

I took a step backward, aimed carefully, and swung the sledge with all my strength. It hit the wedge squarely, and a terrible scream filled the place, while the blood gushed out of the open wound. up and over us, staining the walls and our clothes. Without hesitating, I swung again, and again, and again, while it struggled vainly to rid itself of that awful instrument of death. Another swing and the stake was driven through.

The thing squirmed about in the narrow confines of the coffin, much after the manner of a dismembered worm, and Remson proceeded to sever the head from the body, making a rather crude but effectual job of it. As the final stroke of the knife cut the connection a scream issued from the mouth; and the whole corpse fell away into dust, leaving nothing but a wooden stake lying in a bed of bones.

This finished, we despatched the remaining three. Simultaneously as if struck by the same thought, we felt our throats. The slight pain was gone from mine, and the wounds had entirely disappeared from my friend's, leaving not even a scar.

I wished to place before the world the whole facts contingent upon the mystery and the solution, but Remson prevailed upon me to hold my peace.

Some years later Remson died a Christian death and with him went the only confirmation of my tale. However, ten miles from the little town of Charing there sits an old house, forgotten these many years, and near it is a little grey crypt. Within are four coffins; and in each lies a wooden stake, stained a brownish hue, and bearing the finger-prints of the deceased Remson Holroyd.

GALEN C. COLIN

PAUL Vermain awoke slowly. His blue eyes blinked. He stretched his long form painfully. His strength was hardly enough to lift his blond head from the floor on which he lay. As full consciousness came to him, he gazed about. Above, beneath, on all sides, nothing but closely fitted masonry. A tightly barred window of tiny dimensions admitted the dim light. This was a new experience which the young American could not fathom.

His last memory was of the wonderful Chinese twilight, as he lingered at the wall of old Ling Foo's garden, awaiting Ling Foo's goldenly beautiful daughter, Ti Ling. He recalled, now, a faint sweet odour coming to his nostrils. He had felt a strange drowsiness creeping upon him, and wondered if the scent could be from the white poppies across the wall. He had rested his head on the wall for a minute—then this awakening.

As his strength returned, he arose. A careful search revealed that nothing had been taken from him while he slept. His clothing was not even messed or awry. Robbery evidently was not the motive. His cell was entirely devoid of furniture; it contained not even a bench or box, but by standing on tiptoe he could just reach the grated window with his eyes. The grounds outside were strangely familiar, in a sort of warped and backward way. Then it dawned upon him. He was staring at Ling Foo's garden, but from the side of the stately palace instead of the garden wall.

Why should he, Paul Vermain, representative of the Standard Oil Company in Hia Waku, be a prisoner in the old Chinese professor's home? True, Ling Foo was of the older generation and looked with great disfavour upon all foreign devils, but his hatred had never been active. True, the

young American had held hands with Ti Ling, the daughter of Ling Foo, many times over the garden wall in the hazy dusk but according to American standards there was nothing more than a little pleasurable indiscretion in this. Rack his brain as he would, Vermain could not untangle the mystery. Still drowsy, he lay down again, determined to puzzle his head no more, but to let the solution work itself out as it would.

He dozed.

Then a sound as of a bolt withdrawn awakened him. Still reclining, he opened his eyes. Directly above his face a stone moved; then it swung upward, revealing an opening not more than a foot square. A wrinkled and benevolent yellow face filled the aperture for a moment, and twinkling black eyes surveyed him. Then the face was withdrawn, and a small silver bucket on the end of a chain was lowered beside him. Raising himself on one elbow he lifted it. The contents looked like water. He tasted it. It was water, clear and cool. Becoming conscious of a great thirst, he drained a mighty draught.

The bucket fell from his grasp, the contents drenching his clothing. He tried to lift his hand to raise the bucket again. Every hint of power was gone. He could not even move his head. It was only by great effort that he summoned strength to close his eyelids. When they were closed it was a gigantic task to open them again. Yet the feeling of drowsiness swiftly fled. While every muscle was paralysed, his mind seemed stimulated to as great a degree. He could feel the discomfort of the uneven rock floor, but could not alleviate it by a single movement. Some strange and powerful drug had him firmly in its grip.

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A door in the wall beside him swung silently open, and four half-clothed coolies entered. Without a word they lifted the American and carried him up a short flight of steps into a spacious room, topped by a skylight of orange glass. In the centre of the room they deposited their burden on a teakwood table, hollowed to fit the body of a man most comfortably.

By great effort, Vermain forced his eyes to survey the room. Tiled walls and tiled floor were laid in queer mosaic patterns. Everywhere the same motif was repeated—a great

dragon with wide-spread jaws, but toothless as an old hag. He had seen the design many times before, and cudgelled his brain to remember. Then it came to him. This was the insignia that graced the lintel of every Chinese dentist who had successfully fulfilled his apprenticeship on the graduated wooden pegs. It was more the sign of great strength of wrist and finger than of knowledge—but the practice of dentistry was a profession for the sons of mandarins alone in old China.

Then Vermain's eyes roved again. On the walls were panel after panel, all studded with wooden pegs of varying sizes and lengths. Nothing else but bare floor was visible. The truth rushed upon him. Here was where Ling Foo taught his pupils the quaint art of pulling teeth from unwilling jaws by main strength and artful twist. This table upon which he was lying was, beyond doubt, the scene of the final examination of the apprentices,—actual practice on actual teeth. The young American could not summon strength enough to shudder.

At his head, and consequently out of sight, he heard a door open. A babble of Chinese came to his ears. Although Vermain was fairly proficient in the ancient language, he could distinguish but few of the words, for each voice seemed to be trying to outdo the others. Then they were stilled by a voice deep and resonant, which he recognised as coming from Ling Foo.

The old professor approached the table and stood at Vermain's feet. For several minutes the Chinaman gazed silently at the recumbent figure. The perpetual smile, the wrinkled but kindly old face, the close fitting skull cap and the folded hands gave old Ling Foo a peculiarly benevolent expression which his words could not dispel.

'Ling Foo welcomes the most honourable American to this most miserable hovel,' began the old Chinaman in his singsong salutation. 'The Gods have been good to Ling Foo, the unworthy. They have ordained the white man's visit when Ling Foo's need was the greatest. The hour of the tests of the unworthy pupils was at hand. There was no fitting subject. Then the American comes with his strong white teeth. Truly the Gods are good.'

Words and words—but no explanation. It was now that fear entered Vermain's mind for the first time. He tried to speak, but even his tongue was paralysed. He wanted to explain that he was Vermain, representative of the Standard Oil Company; that he had never harmed Ling Foo: that he was the warm friend—in fact, the accepted lover of Ling Foo's daughter. He wanted to tell Ling Foo that he would feel greatly honoured to make Ti Ling his wife in the good old American way. It was no use, the words would not come.

Slowly the old man turned to the waiting pupils, and as he beckoned he called out a name.

'Fang Tu, come hither. To you, most honourable son of Wu Fang, shall be the honour of the first test.'

With wrinkled thumb and finger, Ling Foo opened the unresisting jaws of the subject.

'Look,' he said to the waiting pupil, 'the teeth are tight-set and strong. It will be a test worthy of all the skill Ling Foo has taught you. See, the one next the first molar. The roots are straight—but long and fast-grown to the flesh. The tooth is small and your grip must be powerful. Ah—it started, but your fingers slipped. Try again—a twist to the right and a twist to the left—now a straight pull. See the red, clean blood! That was worthy of your master.'

The white man's body twitched in agony, but was powerless to move. Only the pressure of finger and thumb was needed to keep his jaws apart, so potent was the drug that bound his muscles. The blood from the wounded mouth almost strangled him, until the old professor and his pupil rolled the unresisting form over and let the red fluid drip on the tiled floor.

Then another pupil was called—and still another—until six teeth had left their moorings in agony. Clean extractions, worthy of China's best, brought exclamations of pride and pleasure to the happy pupils from the old teacher. Bungling work that crushed flesh and bone was followed by clucks of impatience at inferior skill. With each operation Vermain's agony became worse, until it was unbearable. Then he fainted

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When the young American awoke it was dawn of another

day. The effect of the drug had worn off and his strength had returned. The jaw with its toothless holes was inflamed and swollen. It ached terribly. His throat was parched and his whole body was crying for water. Yet he determined that not another drop would pass his lips in this hellhole. Frantically he shook the bars; they were so strong that the strength of six men would not have budged them. The door was close fitting and barred from the outside. He could not move it. In despair he paced the floor of the tiny cell.

It was mid-day when the trap-door was opened and the bucket was lowered. With a thick-voiced curse that was half groan, Vermain snatched it up and dashed it against the wall. Silently the trap closed, and he was again alone with his thirst and pain. Near evening, the torturers again offered him water, and again he refused it.

The night was one of almost madness. Thirst and pain filled the hours, and gradually thirst took the ascendance. The thickly swollen lips uttered growling curses.

Came morning, and with it another offer of water. Vermain clutched the bucket and drew back his arm to dash it at the wall. He stayed his hand. He gazed at the cool crystal-clear liquid. With a groan, he drained the vessel. He sank to the floor inert.

Once more the coolies came and carried him to the torture chamber. This time but four teeth were dragged from the protesting jawbone when merciful unconsciousness came. Vermain awoke again, and found water beside him. This time he drank. Thirst was supreme over pain.

Six days elapsed before the last tooth was pulled, by the master himself. Vermain was almost mad with the agony of body and mind. He had long given up hope of rescue or escape. Death seemed certain for the Chinese would not dare liberate their prisoner to tell his story. A delirious fever developed, and he raved through three mad days. He lived over again the agony of the torture table—yet at intervals the cool small hand of Ti Ling seemed to ease his aching brow. It was during these intervals that the countenance of Ling Foo would darken with hate as he peered through the trap-door at the stricken foreigner; for it enraged him to hear

a white devil making tender love to his daughter, even in delirium.

Then one morning, the fever left the American and he sank to the floor, weak and exhausted. This time the bucket contained nothing but water, cool and sparkling. His abundant vitality soon responded to food and drink, and he became almost himself again.

* * * *

Ling Foo's decision was made. The four frightened coolies entered and overpowered their weakened prisoner. Then they bound his wrists behind his back. Again Vermain was taken to the chamber of tortures, but this time there were no waiting pupils.

Directly to the table in the centre moved the prisoner and his guards. A glance at the bed of horrors brought a shudder of remembrance to his frame, for on the table, pegged in one long row in a testing frame, were all the teeth that had once been so much a part of him—and that had been so painfully removed. Vermain closed his eyes against the sight for a long minute.

He opened them again at a soft touch on his arm. Beside him was Ti Ling, lovely as the lotus blossom. Vermain's heart leapt at the sight of her. The love that he thought so strong before now overwhelmed him. Gone were his misgivings. She was Mongolian—he was white. Very well, what would be the difference? He was soon to die, but living or dead, Ti Ling was his.

Timidly she looked at her love with pitying eyes. Then she started as their eyes met. In his was no hint of fright or pain—they were brimming over with love. A blush suffused her golden skin and her gaze fell. A tremor of joy shook her slender frame. Then both raised their eyes to the figure across the table.

Ling Foo was seated in his great carved chair—his feet on the golden footstool. Gorgeous mandarin robes covered his spare body, and the tasselled cap decorated the shaven head. Across his knees rested the long, curved sacrificial sword.

His voice, now harsh with hatred, startled the lovers.

'O miserable Ti Ling,' he snarled, 'see to what depths

of agony the foreign devil has gone, that he would presume to covet the daughter of Ling Foo, the mandarin! His pain and anguish have been so great that the gods have only permitted him to live through it that he might suffer the last stroke at the hands of Ling Foo. I have made him hideous in your sight so that through the ages that will be your memory of him. I have seen love for him in your eyes, and for that madness you shall also die. With the sacrificial sword of my ancestors will the vengeance be taken. Look at this unsightly creature, Ti Ling, and hate him as I do.'

'Oh, my father,' said Ti Ling, in a low clear voice, 'though you cut off his ears, dig out his eyes, pull out his hair, sever each hand and foot, yet would I love this American. Gladly do I go to death with him.'

Ling Foo's face turned the colour of pale old ivory. His hands shook with rage. Several times he tried to speak and could not. He grasped the great sword in both hands and rose to his feet for the fatal stroke. The weapon flashed a baleful reflection as it was lifted above the old Chinaman's head. It began to descend and Ti Ling bowed her head to receive its force on her slender neck.

The sword clattered to the floor and Ling Foo flung his arms wildly forward to catch himself as the golden footstool overturned beneath his stamping feet. The flying hands found the table's edge too late as the shaven head came down with a crash upon the long row of firm white teeth. The old professor's body went limp as it rolled from the table, taking with it, firmly embedded in the left temple, a long, sharp incisor.

* * * *

The Standard Oil Company's representative in Hia Waku is an upstanding young American, blue of eye and blond of hair. His pearly white teeth are the delight of his goldenly beautiful Chinese wife, Ti Ling. You would say that Paul Vermain's teeth are his own—and truly they are—all but one that is buried with the dust of Ling Foo. The teeth he gathered from the teakwood table in the palace of Ling Foo made a trip across the Pacific to the best dentist in the States—and the plates are marvels of dental art.

R. ANTHONY

MYNHEER van Ragevoort did not like the dark! There were things which he could not see in the dark but which he knew were there. But there were also things that he knew did not exist, which the darkness nevertheless conjured before his eyes. Faces! Spectral figures that floated and threatened and mocked! Many faces, many figures! And those of women chiefly, and girls. Of course they had been witches, and he had condemned them to the torture, to the stake, to the rope. But why should they trouble him, dance about him, beckon him? He had not executed them; he had merely been their Judge, the administrator of the Law! The Law forced him and he was helpless! Still they bothered. Sometimes they seemed so real . . .

Emphatically, Mynheer van Ragevoort, the Justice of Hegemonde, did not like the dark! Worse, noises often came from the night, noises that were mysterious and unaccountable. Sounds like the voices of people, especially sounds of women in pain, shrieking in torture, gasping brokenly!

There! The Justice started. He seemed to recognise a voice—yes, he heard it distinctly. It sounded—ah, now he remembered—the voice of Melisande zer Honde, a slight girl, pale and pretty, a child of scarcely twelve. How she had screamed when the rack drew out her joints and stretched her muscles and ripped the ligaments! Yet she had confessed! He had been amazed that so young a child could be a witch. But witnesses had stated so, and under the torture she had admitted it! So he was forced to sentence her—to burning at the stake. How she had pleaded for life! How she had shrieked when the flames enveloped her! And then that appalling stillness, broken only by the crackling of faggots and the rush of flames!

And then there was the sweet innocent face of Gertrudis Bourdelaide. No, he doubted her accusers. He had known the girl since her birth in fact, he had lifted the child over the baptismal font as her godfather. Terrible—she had been accused—and *had confessed*. They had to carry her away from the torture. He remembered how her crushed legs had quivered in agony, the white bloodless features, the maimed hands. She had endured much but she had confessed! The rope and quartering! But those moans, long-drawn, haunting, unending! Never a shriek, never a cry, only moans. Would he ever forget?

The Justice shook himself. He flung his cloak around his head, and moved down the road, carrying in his hand a small lantern, from which a candle shone weakly. 'Not much good in this thick gloom,' he muttered. There was a fog in the air, which scarcely stirred with his movements. Yet the stillness, the lack of motion, made him feel unsafe, restless. What was behind the gloom?

Hurriedly he trod the road towards his castle, his home. This stood somewhat apart from the city, as became the overlord and Justice. Not for him to live among gossips and smaller tradesmen. Besides, it was the home of his fathers.

A faint rustling sound made him pause. He peered round intently but could perceive nothing. Even his candle seemed unable to pierce the fog beyond his arm's reach. Silence around him! Well, he must move on, towards home, towards rest—perhaps.

Something huge and light fluttered from the fog and fell over his head, covering him with soft folds. In fright he dropped his lantern and gurgled a shriek. He fought back the folds, but they enveloped him tighter and tighter, drawing around him till his arms were helpless.

And then hands seized him, on the right and on the left, and a voice whispered, 'Come . . . but say naught!'

'What—what . . .?' he began. But an insistent prod of some pointed weapon made him move forward.

Forward! But where? Where were they taking him? And for what purpose? The cloth covering his eyes made little difference; he had been unable to see anything without it.

They left the road, moved across ditches, over the veldt. Stops when he was lifted over some obstacle—a hedge or boundary mark, he thought. More veldt. And around him the faint thuds of numerous feet, the slithering noises of mantles brushing against each other, muffled clinks of metal. God! What was in store for him?

The Justice stumbled through a ditch. Then hard and rounded bumps under the feet—ah, he was back in Hegemonde—in the city—among people! If he called . . .!

A sharp point pressed his side and a warning hiss apprised him of what would happen. So he was silent.

Some steps up which he stumbled. Then a chamber. He felt himself led to a seat. How familiar that seat was! With the feet he cautiously felt about himself. Yes, there were the legs of the table, and there was his own footstool. It was his own; he was in the Court of Justice—his own court!

‘Your own court! Your own dais,’ in deadened tones beside him. ‘We are here to try the witch of witches, to try her under the Law. But she must not know us, lest sorrow come to all of us. So speak not above a whisper!’

Routine! But why in the night? And who was the woman they called the witch of witches?

‘Begin!’ The dull command was given.

Routine! Well, he would go through with it. ‘In the Name of the Lord on High,’ he intoned in a penetrating whisper, ‘and in the name of His Majesty, the King of Spain and the Netherlands! There stands before us a—a—’

‘A maiden!’ prompted the voice.

‘—maiden accused of having sold her immortal soul to the foul fiend in unholy conspiracy and of having exercised her black power in wanton sorcery and witchcraft to the detriment of man, woman and child, upon their property, their goods and possessions, and upon their produce.’ A pause, then—‘Woman, do you confess?’

Silence.

‘Who witnesseth against her?’ he continued.

‘We all do witness against her,’ whispered some one in front of him.

‘Aye! Aye! It is true!’ whispered many voices.

'We vow she hath bewitched us or those of our families and contributed to our loss, even the death of our loved ones,' said the accuser.

'Aye, she hath! We do vow it!' chorused the others.

'Doth the witch confess?' Asked Mynheer the Justice. Silence.

'Then to the rack with her—till she confesses!'

A scream of terror, quickly muffled, a sardonic cackle whose uvular tone seemed familiar, then the shuffle of many feet.

The Justice remained seated. No need for him to enter the torture chamber. Besides, he would not be able to see. In fact, he did not care to see. He had seen too many, too many! And they always confessed!

Through the open door he heard the spinning of rolls, the weak clatter of winding drums. A hush replete with indefinite sounds—they were fastening loops around the ankles and wrists of the witch. Then the squeak of turning handles, a pause, another squeak, a moan, a stifled shriek! A wait, then the splash of water! Another squeak of the drums . . .!

In accustomed routine, the Judge leaned to one side of the great chair. Another twist of the rack, then would come the familiar sounds and then—confession! He listened attentively. But there was a bigger, personal question. What were they intending to do with him? And why this secret trial? If they would only talk in loud voices and not in these awful whispers! It was unreal—unreal!

Again the splash of water, then another squeak, followed by faint clicks and tears, joints giving way and flesh ripping! A ghastly shriek! 'God, I confess!' in a pain-shocked voice. 'A-a-h!' and then silence.

Yes, that was the usual result, sometimes a little slower in coming, but not often. There! The quiet cackle. He knew it. No wonder! The skilled hands of the executioner were in charge!

The shuffle of feet once more and then a voice. 'Your Worthiness, she hath confessed her guilt! Your sentence?'

Mynheer van Ragevoort roused himself. Sentence! Very

well! 'To be hanged by the neck until death do claim her. At once!' This would be sufficient, and few preparations necessary. A rope and—

He must be short, he wanted to be away! Let them hurry and free him!

For a long time he sat there and waited—waited silently, for around him all noise had ceased. There had been a little shuffling of men entering the prison enclosure—to see the witch hung, of course—but nothing more. So he sat and pondered. He felt stifled. The cloth over his head impeded his breath, and drowsiness overcame him.

The tramp of feet aroused him. A moment later the fetters were removed from his arms and the cloth lifted from his head and shoulders.

He blinked in the sudden light of torches. Before him he saw a number of hooded figures, all with voluminous cloaks, faces hidden behind black veils. Were these the same men? he wondered.

'So it is here we find you, Sir Justice,' said the leader.

Mynheer did not recognise the voice.

'We looked for you in the castle. You were not there.'

Him. So they looked for him. What did it mean? Why should they look for him when they had him already? And why no longer the whispers? At least he was thankful for that!

'Arise, sir, and take your place. You are to be tried!' said the leader.

Nine men in all, noted Mynheer. Two of them pushed him from the chair and led him down to the bench before the dais.

The tall leader at once occupied the chair of justice.

'Sir Justice, note what I say! You have been tried in secret trial and found guilty! We came tonight to execute sentence. We went to your home and waited for you. You did not come. Later we searched and found you absent. So at length we thought to look here. And here you are!' with sudden humour.

Mynheer van Ragevoort said nothing, only gazed bewildered at the mummer.

‘Sir Justice, we are the *Vehmgericht*. In secret we met and considered you and the justice meted out by you. Sir, you have been an unjust judge. You have been a plague to this land. Like a wild beast you have persecuted the innocent and condemned them to death. Nothing has held you back—not friendship, not pity, not justice, not even the ties of blood! You lusted only to kill.’

He paused and seemed to wait for an objection. Mynheer found the words. ‘They were witches all. They confessed! The Law gave me—’

‘The Law!’ scorned the leader in ringing tones. ‘Your wild superstition was the Law. Not the written Law! With you an accusation was the equal of proof! You never gave fair trial!’

‘They confessed!’ the Justice muttered.

The leader stood up and pointed an accusing finger at him. ‘They confessed—under insane torture. They confessed—to escape further torture! They confessed—what you wished them to confess. Confession indeed! So would you confess! Can an innocent child of ten—for such was Gertrudis Bourdelaide—know anything of wickedness, of sorcery, of witchcraft? Yet you forced her by the vilest tortures to say she was guilty! Did Melisande zer Honde know of witchcraft? She confessed to it—after you tore her on the rack. Did Roberta Deswaaters ever perpetrate any wickedness—she, a patient little saint, who spent most of her young life in pain? Yet you forced her to admit unholy practices—by means of the rack—the stocks! Did Margaret van Voelker or Pieta der Groote—oh, why name them all, the dozens of decent folk you put to death? For years you have sown terror in the land, you have revolted minds with your unheard-of cruelties. You were the scourge of the people until they wearied of it!

‘Men came together and in secret process asked the *Vehmgericht* for justice. When the Law is in unjust hands men may—and must—take the Law from those hands and punish them! That is what the *Vehmgericht* has decided. Sir Justice, stand and hear your sentence!’

Mynheer van Ragevoort rose stiffly. It was all like a dream

and still terribly real. For some reason he could not muster thoughts to utter a protest. Pictures of trials, of tortured women, of executions, raced through his mind. It was true, terribly true, what the leader had said. But he had not meant to be unjust. He, too, had suffered because of his duty. He had wanted to rid the land of a plague of witches, he had wished to make his land free from sorcery and witches for all time to come. Many times he had wavered when friends and even relatives, proved guilty, but resolutely, without fear or favour, he had administered the Law.

The leader was speaking. 'You were sentenced to torture and death,' he said in sombre tones. 'Such was the sentence decided on!'

A pause—Mynheer twisted his hands, his face suddenly pale and beaded with cold drops.

Again the leader spoke, solemnly, impressively, and the eyes that gleamed blackly through the veil held something of pity.

'Torture and death—such was the sentence! But—this sentence will not be carried out—not completely! You shall not die through our hands! For there is worse than Death that has struck you. Perhaps it is the Hand of God! We assembled tonight to carry out the sentence on you. But we found that others had been at work! We found that they had seized you—grief-stricken fathers they were—men fully as crazed with fear of witches as you—they had captured the witch of witches, as they thought—had tried her before your court, tortured her and hanged her. Their vengeance is gruesome!'

What did it all mean? Mynheer van Ragevoort seemed paralysed. His eyes were wide, his mouth open, all his features expressed complete lack of understanding.

'You know not,' continued the leader, 'who the witch of witches was? Nor will I tell you. They blinded you, Sir Justice, and blind was your judgment. But a taste of the torture shall be yours, and then you will be freed. Perhaps—perhaps you will be more forbearing hereafter. To work, men!'

Strong hands seized Mynheer van Ragevoort and quickly

stripped him of his clothes. In a trice, so it seemed, they bore him to the torture chamber and looped the ropes around his wrists and ankles.

A spin of the drums, the ropes tautened and squeaked, pain unbearable shot through his limbs and scorched his joints.

‘Another turn!’ commanded the leader.

Agonised sweat rolled over the Justice’s body, his mouth sagged and a croak came from his throat. ‘I—I confess . . .’ he moaned.

‘Confess?’ exclaimed the leader in chill tones. ‘Confess to what?’

The taut body could not even writhe—could only quiver.

‘I—know not.’ Mynheer gasped.

‘Nor we!’ the leader made a gesture, the drums swung back a half-turn and tightened with a jerk.

Suffering indescribable tore into him—the Justice fainted. Water, splashed over his head, awoke him. God! Now he knew that crazing agony! He had sometimes wondered why the accused gave in so readily after a few whirls of the drums. He had been inclined to despise them as weaklings. Guilt alone could not endure, innocence certainly must! But now he knew. Oh, to escape this torment! Anything—anything—even death! But to escape!

A searing pain at his sides, yet he knew not whether it was hot or cold metal that touched him! And then the ropes became slack. What they did with him, he scarcely knew—his whole body ached with tearing pains. And his head! It pounded, and pounded and pounded.

A raw pang on his forefinger seemed to swell and swell until his arm—no, his body—grew large with the torment. What were they doing? He saw it—a pincer was plucking at a finger-nail—slowly pulling it from its foundation. God! What could he do to get away from such torture? Waves of pain welled forth from the finger, greater than his body could endure!

Something else! They had bound his wrists behind him; his ankles also were bound with heavy weights attached.

Why this? Why didn't they simply kill him and be done with it?

A hook slipped under his fettered wrists, there was a pull, and suddenly he soared, his weighted body suspended by the wrists. And then he dropped. Again they drew him aloft and dropped him. Shoulders twisted and cracked and ached, his body seemed an immense pain. He fainted.

A rocking motion aroused him. He was dressed and covered with a cloth; they were carrying him. He felt strangely numb, conscious of ever-present but subdued pain. And so weary, so weak, so exhausted!

At last the motion changed. They had entered some dwelling, and now they laid him down. Steps moved away, and then some one spoke—the leader.

'The sentence has been executed, Sir Justice. May it teach you to be more merciful hereafter! We leave you now—with your victim.'

Half-conscious, he wondered. 'My victim?' he asked, his voice muffled by the enveloping cloak.

'Look and see,' said a chilling whisper. There were quick steps, the slam of a door and then silence.

Mynheer van Ragevoort scrambled painfully to his feet, weakened hands tore at the enshrouding folds. There, he saw light—the cloth fell away. But he knew the room—those paintings—that table—the chairs—why, he was in his own home! So they had carried him to his house, his castle!

He was thankful for even that. But why this strange oppressive silence in the house? Where were the servants? And his—

His roving eyes caught sight of something. Over there, on the great divan, lay something very limp and still, covered with a white sheet. That—that—his victim, the leader had said. But in this house—was it—everything was so silent—was it his . . .? No, no, it must not be!

He crept weakly to the divan and tore the sheet from the still figure. 'God! Anne-Marie! My daughter!'

He stared at her unbelieving, uncomprehending. His victim? Oh, no! Not that, not that! But it was his daughter who lay there, lifeless, features frozen in an eternal mask.

Slowly he inspected her. Quivering fingers felt the soft flesh, not yet rigored in death. He saw raw welts around her wrists and bare ankles. Around her neck an irregular stripe—they had hanged her!

His victim! It was she—Anne-Marie, his daughter—that had been tried as the witch of witches that night! They had tortured her and—and—he had ordered the torture! '*And she confessed,*' he groaned, 'I—I ordered—her execution—as a witch! God!'

The room reeled and he crashed to the floor.

FLAVIA RICHARDSON

GODFREY Ellerton picked up the little green figure of a cat that he had bought that afternoon in a shop close to the British Museum. It was a pretty little thing, hard and cold to the touch, made in some composition. The dealer who had sold it to him had been unable to name the material, and in consequence had been disposed to let it go for a comparatively small sum. Most buyers wanted bronze or ivory or authentic work from some locality.

Godfrey had bought it because he liked it, and because it would make a pleasant addition to the ornaments on his mantelpiece.

The door, which he had left slightly ajar, was pushed open a little further. Simpkins, the black cat belonging to the housekeeper, came in, in his usual stately manner. He was well aware that the 'third floor front' generally had crumpets for tea—and Simpkins's soul thrilled at the thought of butter.

'Hullo, old boy,' said Godfrey carelessly. 'Come and see what I've got. A little cousin of yours!'

Simpkins pursued his stately way round the table, put his paws on Godfrey's knee and jumped up. Then a strange thing took place. Simpkins sniffed at the little composition figure—once, twice, and then arched his back and spat violently. For a second longer he paused, then sprang to the floor in one long wild leap, and hid himself behind the corner cupboard.

'Well, that's funny', said Godfrey half-aloud. 'I didn't know you were as jealous as all that, Simpkins.'

Getting to his feet, he set the little cat well out of reach on the mantelpiece and then bent down to coax the erring Simpkins.

It took him exactly eleven and a half minutes by his watch to persuade Simpkins to come out into the open, and even then the cat sidled round the outskirts of the room. When he reached the fireplace, he gave one leap across the hearth-rug and subsided, trembling, under a chair.

Godfrey picked him up at last and comforted him with thoughts of tea and crumpets, but he could feel the quick thudding of Simpkins's heart, and the instinctive bristling of his fur.

The crumpets were not much of a success that afternoon. It was patent to Godfrey that Simpkins was only staying in the room because he was too proud to run away, and because he was a creature of fixed habits. But he ate his portion of tea and lapped his milk with one ear cocked and his muscles tensed.

Presently Simpkins went away and Godfrey settled down to read. He turned a few pages, then threw the book down with a laugh.

'I wonder what upset old Simpkins so much,' he said to himself.

The thought was sufficient to send him across to the fireplace. He took the little cat down from the mantelpiece and studied it closely. It seemed entirely ordinary. Not thinking much of what he was doing, Godfrey went back to his seat, still clutching the cat. He put it on the table at his elbow.

The shadows lengthened. The lamplighter came round the streets and touched the lamps to sudden life. The beams from one of them on the other side of the road touched Godfrey's window, and made a bar of molten gold on the floor. He switched on the reading lamp, but did not trouble to rise and draw the curtains.

As he sat down his hand came into contact with the little cat. He drew it away sharply and looked at his fingers. Puzzled, he stared again. He could have sworn that he had touched something soft and yet damp, furry yet with a trace of the sleekness of a seal.

He read a page or two, then forced by some unconscious

desire, put out his hand again and felt the little cat. It was quite cold and hard, just as he had expected.

Godfrey laughed and went on reading. About half an hour later he suddenly became aware that there was another presence in the room. He looked up, rather unnerved. The room was dark, save for the bar of lamp-light on the floor and the little circle of light cast by the shaded reading lamp. Just outside that little circle of light were two pin-points of light . . . green light . . . like the eyes of a cat.

He muttered an oath, and, overcoming an extraordinary feeling of repulsion, caught up the cat. He studied it carefully, and then set it down again.

‘A trick of the light,’ he muttered. ‘Must have caught some curious cross-reflection. Funny effect.’

He got up and drew the curtains across the windows, so that the golden bar was shut out. Now the room was quite dark but for the reading lamp. As he went back to his chair, Godfrey could not keep his eyes off the little cat. It seemed to have grown. It seemed to be smiling. The eyes were distinctly alight—green eyes—beastly—indescribably beastly . . .

Godfrey felt rather sick. He held on to the chair while he rapidly thought over what he had eaten that day. Nothing that could have troubled his digestion so much. And there was the very odd behaviour of Simpkins an hour or so earlier . . . He looked again.

The green cat had grown larger . . . and it had moved . . . It was now almost entirely inside the circle of light, and while this movement took some of the brightness away from its eyes, it emphasised the horror that was growing. As Godfrey looked, he became aware that the smooth back was ruffling, the eyes were dropping, hair was growing . . .

‘Dear Heaven!’ he muttered. ‘Am I mad?’

He dared not leave the room. The table stood between him and the door and he was curiously aware that he would not be allowed to pass the cat. The knowledge that he was for the time being under the dominion of a stronger power than himself was disturbing, but at least it removed any necessity for active decision.

The cat was definitely growing larger. Now it was almost

life-sized. But it did not stop. It went on growing steadily, with a terrible remorseless growth that emphasised its inevitability.

Still Godfrey stood and stared. He realised that the hand which was gripping the back of the chair was stiff and bruised with the pressure he had exerted. But he did not dare to leave go. That homely solid chairback was his one protection against madness, the one security he felt in a tottering world.

Then he became conscious of a new sound in the room—very faint and far away—the sound of a thin-sweet music—the music that comes from reed instruments. The high, thin notes came clearly through the air. The cat heard them, too. It expanded again, and then it smiled.

The smile made Godfrey close his eyes. Then he opened them again because, horrible as it was to see the cat, it was more horrible to be shut out from what was going on.

The smile became so broad that the cat seemed to vanish.

‘A Cheshire cat,’ Godfrey muttered to himself. ‘A Cheshire cat!’ The cat faded away and only the grin was left.

A grin. Surely one could combat a disembodied thing—a ludicrous thing like a grin with no face behind it? He shifted his grip on the chair-back and swung his weight slightly more forward.

But before he could move, the music swelled and changed. There was a menacing note now behind the reeds, a note that held him with a strange, unknown fear. And yet he was aware that this was not unknown. There was something about it, aeons old, that called to him, something that echoed faintly through the centuries and found its answer in his subconscious brain.

The cat had reappeared. It had grown larger. Soon it would have to leave the table. It was too big to accommodate itself in comfort.

Suddenly Godfrey knew that when the cat left the table his nerve would go. As long as it was perched there, it seemed to be isolated, on a different plane. But as soon as it descended, as soon as it left the ring of light, it would

be something ineffably terrifying. As he looked, it moved, stretched one paw out delicately, and then another. And then it grinned again, and its eyes grew larger and more ancient.

The music swelled, died down and swelled again. A strange odour was creeping into the room. Restively, Godfrey became aware of it. Strange, yet reminiscent. New, yet entirely old. Stale, yet with the fresh sweetness of spices, of sunshine and the long hot days.

For a second, his conscious mind refused to register. Then he knew the smell and grew still more afraid. It was the smell of incense and of the perfumes of the dead.

Words began to mingle with the music. Words in some long dead tongue that he had never known. Yet their import began to convey itself to him, through the brain and the long sleeping souls of years.

He tried to cry out for help, but he could not. He tried to tell himself that it was a dream, a nightmare, but he knew it was true.

He saw the great cat raise itself, arching its back, sweeping its tail, like some animal of the jungle that is aware that the prey is safely cornered. There was something revolting about its movements, something that subtly expressed its certainty, the complete absence of haste. What was written was written.

The words grew clearer now and Godfrey felt that strange certainty that in a little while he would himself be able to join in the song. Registration was becoming clearer, he felt as if he were groping for the words of a half-forgotten hymn . . .

The cat came to the edge of the table and looked up at him. Compelled by some power stronger than himself, Godfrey met its eyes.

The sight of them sent the blood coldly through his veins. In those green eyes was mirrored the terror of the ages, the ancient sin that never dies . . . the crime for which there is no atonement.

And he knew that he must be part and lot in that sin, enduring through the years as long as heaven and earth should endure—that for him there would be no return.

The music was louder now, almost deafening. Drums had been added to the reed instruments. They were beating out a song of triumph. The big cat purred and licked its chops, languorously, lustfully.

The power that had been Godfrey's will was slipping away. He knew now that the words of the hymn were ringing in his mind. In a moment he would open his lips and utter them . . . and then there would be no hope.

The cat yawned and then gathered itself together as if for a spring.

The room seemed to be full of voices. The hymn surged on to a triumphant roll of drums and the words became clearer. Godfrey could hear them now with his earthly ears, as well as with his mind.

But one word still eluded him and he tried to shut his mind and his memory, for until he could say that name of the cat he was safe.

Of a sudden, it seemed to grow angry, as though aware that his puny will was being pitted against the forces of the past. It drew itself up still further . . . The sound of voices grew louder.

And then Godfrey knew the name of the cat, the name of fear, the name of dread, the name that was whispered in hushed tones in Thebes before the dawning of the Day. And the muscles of his throat tightened and his eyes started forward in their sockets as he strove to control the overwhelming desire to say that word aloud.

Around him were the voices, jibing, commanding, luring . . .

The desire was overwhelming. The scent of the incense rose in his nostrils, he could scarcely stand for the cloying sweet faintness that overtook his senses . . . yet he stood firm.

Then the great cat sprang. As he felt its claws in his neck, felt the hot fetid breath upon his face, Godfrey knew a great sense of relief, in that the end had come but he had not yet spoken.

And as he lost consciousness, he heard the snarls of the great beast, baulked of its final desire, and the cries of the

people whom he could not see, rising in applause and honour of Pasht, who is Bubastis, who is the Sin of Egypt . . .

* * * *

When they found him in the morning his face was very peaceful, though his throat had been marked with scratches that might have been made by a very large cat. Neither the doctor nor the landlady could understand them . . .

But Simpkins, after nosing round that door with the utmost care, ran in and spat at a figure of a small green cat that was half-hidden by the body of Godfrey Ellerton.

THE CURSE OF YIG

ZEALIA BROWN REED

IN 1925 I went into Oklahoma looking for snake lore, and I came out with a fear of snakes that will last me the rest of my life. I admit it is foolish, since there are natural explanations for everything I saw and heard, but it masters me none the less. If the old story had been all there was to it, I would not have been so badly shaken. My work as an American Indian ethnologist has hardened me to all kinds of extravagant legendary, and I know that simple white people can beat the redskins at their own game when it comes to fanciful inventions. But I can't forget what I saw with my own eyes at the insane asylum in Guthrie.

I called at that asylum because a few of the oldest settlers told me I would find something important there. Neither Indians nor white men would discuss the snake-god legends I had come to trace. The oil-boom new-comers, of course, knew nothing of such matters, and the red men and old pioneers were plainly frightened when I spoke of them. Not more than six or seven people mentioned the asylum, and those who did were careful to talk in whispers. But the whisperers said that Dr. McNeill could show me a very terrible relic and tell me all I wanted to know. He could explain why Yig, the half-human father of serpents, is a shunned and feared subject in central Oklahoma, and why old settlers shiver at the secret Indian orgies which make the autumn days and nights hideous with the ceaseless beating of tom-toms in lonely places.

It was with the scent of a hound on the trail that I went to Guthrie for I had spent many years collecting data on the evolution of serpent-worship among the Indians. I had always felt, from well defined undertones of legend and archaeology,

that great Quetzalcoatl—benign snake-god of the Mexicans—had had an older and darker prototype; and during recent months I had well-nigh proved it in a series of researches stretching from Guatemala to the Oklahoma plains. But everything was tantalizing and incomplete, for above the border the cult of the snake was hedged about by fear and furtiveness.

Now it appeared that a new and copious source of data was about to dawn, and I sought the head of the asylum with an eagerness that I did not try to cloak. Dr. McNeill was a small, clean-shaven man of somewhat advanced years, and I saw at once from his speech and manner that he was a scholar of no mean attainments in many branches outside his profession. Grave and doubtful when I first made known my errand, his face grew thoughtful as he carefully scanned my credentials and the letter of introduction which a kindly old ex-Indian agent had given me.

‘So you’ve been studying the Yig-legend, eh?’ he reflected sententiously. ‘I know that many of our Oklahoma ethnologists have tried to connect it with Quetzalcoatl, but I don’t think any of them have traced the intermediate steps so well. You’ve done remarkable work for a man as young as you seem to be and you certainly deserve all the data we can give.’

‘I don’t suppose old Major Moore or any of the others told you what it is I have here. They don’t like to talk about it, and neither do I. It is very tragic and very horrible, and that is all. I refuse to consider it anything supernatural. There is a story about it that I’ll tell you after you’ve seen it—a devilish sad story but one that I won’t call magic. It merely shows the potency that belief has over some people. I’ll admit there are times when I feel a shiver that’s more than physical, but in daylight I set all that down to nerves. I’m not a young fellow any more, alas!’

‘To come to the point, the thing I have is what you might call a victim of Yig’s curse—a physically living victim. We don’t let the bulk of the nurses see it, though most of them know it’s here. There are just two steady old chaps whom I let feed it and clean out its quarters—used to be three,

but good old Stevens passed on a few years ago. I suppose I'll have to break in a new group pretty soon; for the thing doesn't seem to age or change much, and we old boys can't last for ever. Maybe the ethics of the near future will let us give it a merciful release, but it's hard to tell.

'Did you see that single,' ground-glass basement window over in the east wing when you came up the drive? That's where it is. I'll take you there myself now. You needn't make any comment. Just look through the movable panel in the door and thank God the light isn't any stronger. Then I'll tell you the story—or as much of it as I've been able to piece together!'

We walked downstairs very quietly, and did not talk as we threaded the corridors of the seemingly deserted basement. Dr. McNeill unlocked a grey-painted steel door, but it was only a bulkhead leading to a further stretch of hallway. At length he paused before a door marked B 116, opened a small observation panel which he could use only by standing on tiptoe, and pounded several times upon the painted metal, as if to arouse the occupant, whatever it might be.

A faint stench came from the aperture as the doctor unclosed it, and I fancied his pounding elicited a kind of low, hissing response. Finally he motioned me to replace him at the peep-hole and I did so with a causeless and increasing tremor. The barred, ground-glass window close to the earth outside, admitted only a feeble and uncertain pallor; and I had to look into the malodorous den for several seconds, before I could see what was crawling and wriggling about on the straw-covered floor, emitting every now and then a weak and vacuous hiss. Then the shadowed outlines began to take shape, and I perceived that the squirming entity bore some resemblance to a human form laid flat on its belly. I clutched at the door handle for support as I tried to keep from fainting.

The moving object was almost of human size, and entirely devoid of clothing. It was absolutely hairless, and its tawny-looking back seemed subtly squamous in the dim, ghoulis light. Around the shoulders it was rather speckled and brownish and the head was very curiously flat. As it looked

up to hiss at me I saw the beady little black eyes were damnably anthropoid, but I could not bear to study them long. They fastened themselves upon me with a horrible persistence, so that I closed the panel gaspingly and left the creature to wriggle about unseen in its matted straw and spectral twilight. I must have reeled a bit, for I saw that the doctor was gently holding my arm as he guided me away. I was stuttering over and over again: 'B-but for God's sake, *what is it?*'

Dr. McNeill told me the story in his private office as I sprawled opposite him in an easy chair. The gold and crimson of late afternoon changed to the violet of early dusk, but still I sat awed and motionless. I resented every ring of the telephone and every whir of the buzzer, and I could have cursed the nurses and interns whose knocks now and then summoned the doctor briefly to the outer office. Night came, and I was glad my host switched on all the lights. Scientist though I was, my zeal for research was half forgotten amid such breathless ecstasies of fright as a small boy might feel when whispered witch-tales go the rounds of the chimney corner.

It seems that Yig, the snake-god of the central plains tribes—presumably the primal source of the more southerly Quetzalcoatl or Kukulcan—was an odd, half-anthropomorphic devil of highly arbitrary and capricious nature. He was not wholly evil, and was usually quite well disposed toward those who gave proper respect to him and his children, the serpents; but in the autumn he became abnormally ravenous, and had to be driven away by means of suitable rites. That was why the tom-toms in the Pawnee, Wichita and Caddo country pounded ceaselessly week in and week out in August, September and October; and why the medicine-men made strange noises with their rattles and whistles curiously like those of the Aztecs and Mayas.

Yig's chief trait was a relentless devotion to his children—a devotion so great that the redskins almost feared to protect themselves from the venomous rattlesnakes which thronged the region. Frightful clandestine tales hinted of his vengeance upon mortals who flouted him or wreaked harm upon his

wriggling progeny; his chosen method being to turn his victim, after suitable tortures, to a spotted snake.

In the old days of the Indian Territory, the doctor went on, there was not quite so much secrecy about Yig. The plains tribes, less cautious than the desert nomads and Pueblos, talked quite freely of their legends and autumn ceremonies with the first Indian agents, and let considerable of the lore spread out through the neighbouring regions of white settlement. The great fear came in the land-rush days of 'eighty-nine, when some extraordinary incidents had been rumoured, and the rumours sustained by what seemed to be hideously tangible proofs. Indians said that the new white men did not know how to get on with Yig and afterwards the settlers came to take that theory at face value. Now no old-timer in middle Oklahoma, white or red, could be induced to breathe a word about the snake-god except in vague hints. Yet, after all, the doctor added with almost needless emphasis, the only truly authenticated horror had been a thing of pitiful tragedy rather than of bewitchment. It was all very material and cruel—even that last phase which had caused so much dispute.

Dr. McNeill paused and cleared his throat before getting down to his special story, and I felt a tingling sensation as when a theatre curtain rises. The thing had begun when Walker Davis and his wife Audrey left Arkansas to settle in the newly opened public lands in the spring of 1889, and the end had come in the country of the Wichitas—north of the Wichita River, in what is at present Caddo County. There is a small village called Binger there now, and the railway goes through; but otherwise the place is less changed than other parts of Oklahoma. It is still a section of farms and ranches—quite productive in these days—since the great oil-fields do not come very close.

Walker and Audrey had come from Franklin County in the Ozarks with a canvas-topped wagon, two mules, an ancient and useless dog called Wolf, and all their household goods. They were typical hill-folk, youngish and perhaps a little more ambitious than most, and looked forward to a life of better returns for their hard work than they had had

in Arkansas. Both were lean, raw-boned specimens; the man tall, sandy and grey-eyed, and the woman short and rather dark, with a black straightness of hair suggesting a slight Indian mixture.

In general, there was very little of distinction about them, and but for one thing their annals might not have differed from those of thousands of pioneers who flocked into the new country at that time. That thing was Walker's almost epileptic fear of snakes, which some laid to prenatal causes, and some said came from a dark prophecy about his end, with which an old Indian squaw had tried to scare him when he was small. Whatever the cause, the effect was marked indeed; for despite his strong general courage, the very mention of a snake would cause him to grow faint and pale, while the sight of even a tiny specimen would produce a shock sometimes bordering on a convulsion seizure.

The Davises started out early in the year, in the hope of being on their new land for the spring ploughing. Travel was slow; for the roads were bad in Arkansas, while in the Territory there were great stretches of rolling hills and red, sandy barrens without any roads whatever. As the terrain grew flatter, the change from their native mountains depressed them more, perhaps, than they realized; but they found the people at the Indian agencies very affable, while most of the settled Indians seemed friendly and civil. Now and then they encountered a fellow-pioneer, with whom crude pleasantries and expressions of amiable rivalry were generally exchanged.

Owing to the season, there were not many snakes in evidence, so Walker did not suffer from his special temperamental weakness. In the earlier stages of the journey, too, there were no Indian snake-legends to trouble him; for the transplanted tribes from the south-east do not share the wilder beliefs of their western neighbours. As fate would have it, it was a white man at Okmulgee in the Creek country who gave the Davises the first hint of the Yig beliefs; a hint which had a curiously fascinating effect on Walker, and caused him to ask questions very freely after that.

Before long, Walker's fascination had developed into a bad case of fright. He took the most extraordinary pre-

cautions at each of the nightly camps, always clearing away whatever vegetation he found, and avoiding stony places whenever he could. Every clump of stunted bushes and every cleft in the great slab-like rocks seemed to him now to hide malevolent serpents, while every human figure not obviously part of a settlement or emigrant train, seemed to him a potential snake-god till nearness had proved the contrary. Fortunately no troublesome encounters came at this stage to shake his nerves still further.

As they approached the Kickapoo country they found it harder and harder to avoid coming near rocks. Finally it was no longer possible, and poor Walker was reduced to the puerile expedient of droning some of the rustic anti-snake charms he had learned in his boyhood. Two or three times a snake was really glimpsed, and these sights did not help the sufferer in his efforts to preserve composure.

On the twenty-second evening of the journey, a savage wind made it imperative for the sake of the mules, to camp in as sheltered a spot as possible; and Audrey persuaded her husband to take advantage of a cliff which rose uncommonly high above the dried bed of a former tributary of the Canadian River. He did not like the rocky cast of the place, but allowed himself to be over-ruled this once; leading the animals sullenly towards the protecting slope, which the nature of the ground would not allow the wagon to approach.

Audrey, examining the rocks near the wagon, meanwhile noticed a singular sniffing on the part of the old dog. Seizing a rifle, she followed his lead, and presently thanked her stars that she had forestalled Walker in her discovery. For there, snugly nested in the gap between two boulders, was a sight it would have done him no good to see. Visible only as one convoluted expanse, but perhaps comprising as many as three or four separate units, was a mass of lazy wriggling which could not be other than a brood of new-hatched rattlesnakes.

Anxious to save Walker from a trying shock, Audrey did not hesitate to act, but took the gun firmly by the barrel and brought the butt down again and again upon the writhing objects. Her own sense of loathing was great, but

it did not amount to a real fear. Finally she saw that her task was done, and turned to cleanse the improvised bludgeon in the red sand and dry, dead grass near by. She must, she reflected, cover the nest up before Walker got back from tethering the mules. Old Wolf, tottering relic of mixed shepherd and coyote that he was, had vanished, and she feared he had gone to fetch his master.

Footsteps at that instant proved her fear well founded. A second more and Walker had seen everything. Audrey made a move to catch him if he should faint, but he did no more than sway. Then the look of pure fright on his bloodless face turned slowly to something like mingled awe and anger, and he began to upbraid his wife in trembling tones.

'Gawd's sake, Aud, but why'd ye go for to do that? Hain't ye heerd all the things they've ben tellin' about this snake-devil Yig? Ye'd ought to a told me, and we'd a moved on. Don't ye know they's a devil-god what gets even if ye hurt his children? What for d'ye think the Injuns all dances and beats their drums in the fall about? This land's under a curse, I tell ye—nigh every soul we've talked to sence we come in's said the same. Yig rules here, and he comes out every fall to git his victims and turn 'em into snakes. Why, Aud, they won't none of them Injuns across the Canayjin kill a snake for love or money!

'Gawd knows what ye done to yourself, gal, a-stompin' out a hull brood o' Yig's chillen. He'll git ye sure, sooner or later, unless I kin buy a charm offen some o' the Injun medicine men. He'll git ye, Aud, as sure as there's a Gawd in heaven he'll come outa the night and turn ye into a crawlin' spotted snake!'

All the rest of the journey Walker kept up the frightened reproofs and prophecies. They crossed the Canadian near Newcastle, and soon afterwards met with the first of the real plains Indians they had seen—a party of blanketed Wichitas, whose leader talked freely under the spell of the whisky offered him, and taught poor Walker a long-winded protective charm against Yig in exchange for a quart bottle of the same inspiring fluid. By the end of the week the chosen site

in the Wichita country was reached, and the Davises made haste to trace their boundaries and perform the spring ploughing before even beginning the construction of a cabin.

The region was flat, drearily windy, and sparse of natural vegetation, but promised great fertility under cultivation. Occasional outcropping of granite diversified a soil of decomposed red sandstone, and here and there a great flat rock would stretch along the surface of the ground like a man-made floor. There seemed to be very few snakes, or possible dens for them, so Audrey at last persuaded Walker to build the one-room cabin over a vast, smooth slab of exposed stone. With such a flooring and with a good-sized fireplace the wettest weather might be defied—though it soon became evident that dampness was no salient quality of the district. Logs were hauled in the wagon from the nearest belt of woods, many miles towards the Wichita Mountains.

Walker built his wide-chimneyed cabin and crude barn with the aid of some of the other settlers, though the nearest one was over a mile away. In turn, he helped his helpers at similar house-raisings, so that many ties of friendship sprang up between the new neighbours. There was no town worthy of the name nearer than El Reno, on the railway, thirty miles or more to the north-east; and before many weeks had passed, the people of the section had become very cohesive despite the wideness of their scattering. The Indians, a few of whom had begun to settle down on ranches, were for the most part harmless, though somewhat quarrelsome when fired by the liquid stimulation which found its way to them despite all Government bans.

Of all the neighbours, the Davises found Joe and Sally Compton, who likewise hailed from Arkansas, the most helpful and congenial. Sally is still alive, known as Grandma Compton; and her son Clyde, then an infant in arms, has become one of the leading men of the State. Sally and Audrey used to visit each other often, for their cabins were only two miles apart; and in the long spring and summer afternoons they exchanged many a tale of old Arkansas and many a rumour about the new country.

Sally was very sympathetic about Walker's weakness

regarding snakes, but perhaps did more to aggravate than cure the parallel nervousness which Audrey was acquiring through his incessant praying and prophesying about the curse of Yig. She was uncommonly full of gruesome snake stories, and produced a direfully strong impression by her acknowledged masterpiece—the tale of a man in Scott County who had been bitten by a whole horde of rattlers at once, and had swelled so monstrously from poison that his body had finally burst with a pop. Needless to say, Audrey did not repeat this anecdote to her husband, and she implored the Comptons to beware of starting it on the rounds of the countryside. It is to Joe's and Sally's credit that they heeded this plea with the utmost fidelity.

Walker did his corn-planting early, and in midsummer improved his time by harvesting a fair crop of the native grass of the region. With the help of Joe Compton he dug a well which gave a moderate supply of very good water, though he planned to sink an artesian later on. He did not run into many serious snake scares, and made his land as inhospitable as possible for wriggling visitors. Every now and then he rode over to the cluster of thatched conical huts which formed the main village of the Wichitas, and talked long with the old men and shamans about the snake-god and how to nullify his wrath. Charms were always ready in exchange for whisky, but much of the information he got was far from reassuring.

Yig was a great god. He was bad medicine. He did not forget things. In the autumn his children were hungry and wild, and Yig was hungry and wild, too. All the tribes made medicine against Yig when the corn harvest came. They gave him some corn, and danced in proper regalia to the sound of whistle, rattle and drum. They kept the drums pounding to drive Yig away, and called down the aid of Tirawa, whose children men are, even as snakes are Yig's children. It was bad that the squaw of Davis killed the children of Yig. Let Davis say the charms many times when the corn harvest comes. Yig is Yig. Yig is a great god.

By the time the corn harvest did come, Walker had succeeded in getting his wife into a deplorably jumpy state. His

prayers and borrowed incantations came to be a nuisance; and when the autumn rites of the Indians began, there was always a distant windborne pounding of tom-toms to lend an added background of the sinister. It was maddening to have the muffled clatter always stealing over the wide red plains. Why would it never stop? Day and night, week on week, it was always going in exhaustless relays, as persistently as the red dusty winds that carried it. Audrey loathed it more than her husband did, for he saw in it a compensating element of protection. It was with this sense of a mighty, intangible bulwark against evil that he got in his corn crop and prepared cabin and stable for the coming winter.

The autumn was abnormally warm, and except for their primitive cooking the Davises found scant use for the stone fireplace Walker had built with such care. Something in the unnaturalness of the hot dust-clouds preyed on the nerves of all the settlers, but most of all on Audrey's and Walker's. The notions of a hovering snake-curse and the weird, endless rhythm of the distant Indian drums formed a bad combination which any added element of the bizarre went far to render utterly unendurable.

Notwithstanding this strain, several festive gatherings were held at one or other of the cabins after the crops were reaped; keeping naively alive in modernity those curious rites of the harvest-home which are as old as human agriculture itself. Lafayette Smith, who came from southern Missouri and had a cabin about three miles east of Walker's, was a very passable fiddler; and his tunes did much to make the celebrants forget the monotonous beating of the distant tom-toms. Then Hallowe'en drew near, and the settlers planned another frolic—this time, had they but known it, of a lineage older than even agriculture; the dread Witch-Sabbath of the primal pre-Aryans, kept alive through ages in the midnight blackness of secret woods, and still hinting at vague terrors under its latter-day mask of comedy and lightness. Hallowe'en was to fall on a Thursday, and the neighbours agreed to gather for their first revel at the Davis cabin.

It was on that thirty-first of October that the warm weather

broke. The morning was grey and leaden, and by noon the incessant winds had changed from searingness to rawness. People shivered all the more because they were not prepared for the chill, and Walker Davis's old dog Wolf dragged himself wearily indoors to a place beside the hearth. But the distant drums still thumped on, nor were the white citizenry less inclined to pursue their chosen rites. As early as four in the afternoon the wagons began to arrive at Walker's cabin; and in the evening, after a memorable barbecue, Lafayette Smith's fiddle inspired a very fair-sized company to great feats of saltatory grotesqueness in the one good-sized but crowded room. The younger folk indulged in the amiable inanities proper to the season, and now and then old Wolf would howl with doleful and spine-tickling ominousness at some especially spectral strain from Lafayette's squeaky violin—a device he had never heard before. Mostly, though, this battered veteran slept through the merriment; for he was past the age of active interests and lived largely in his dreams. Tom and Jennie Rigby had brought their collie, Zeke, along, but the canines did not fraternize. Zeke seemed strangely uneasy over something and nosed around curiously all the evening.

Audrey and Walker made a fine couple on the floor, and Grandma Compton still likes to recall her impression of their dancing that night. Their worries seemed forgotten for the once, and Walker was shaved and trimmed into a surprising degree of spruceness. By ten o'clock all hands were healthily tired, and the guests began to depart family by family with many handshakings and bluff assurances of what a fine time everybody had had. Tom and Jennie thought Zeke's eerie howls as he followed them to their wagon were marks of regret at having to go home; though Audrey said it must be the far away tom-toms which annoyed him, for the distant thumping was surely ghastly enough after the merriment within.

The night was bitterly cold, and for the first time Walker put a great log in the fireplace and banked it with ashes to keep it smouldering till morning. Old Wolf dragged himself within the ruddy glow and lapsed into his customary coma.

Audrey and Walker, too tired to think of charms or curses, tumbled into the rough pine bed and were asleep before the cheap alarm-clock on the mantel had ticked out three minutes. And from far away, the rhythmic pounding of those hellish tom-toms still pulsed on the chill night-wind.

Dr. McNeill paused here and removed his glasses, as if a blurring of the objective world might make the reminiscent vision clearer.

'You'll soon appreciate,' he said, 'that I had a great deal of difficulty in piecing out all that happened after the guests left. There were times though—at first—when I was able to make a try at it.' After a moment of silence, he went on with the tale.

Audrey had terrible dreams of Yig, who appeared to her in the guise of Satan as depicted in cheap engravings she had seen. It was, indeed, from an absolute ecstasy of nightmare that she started suddenly awake to find Walker already conscious and sitting up in bed. He seemed to be listening intently to something, and silenced her with a whisper when she asked what had aroused him.

'Hark, Aud!' he breathed. 'Don't ye hear somethin' a-singin' and buzzin' and rustlin'? D'ye reckon it's the fall crickets?'

Certainly there was distinctly audible within the cabin such a sound as he had described. Audrey tried to analyse it, and was impressed with some element at once horrible and familiar, which hovered just outside the rim of her memory. And beyond it all, waking a hideous thought, the monotonous beating of the distant tom-toms came incessantly across the black plains on which a cloudy half-moon had set.

'Walker,—s'pose it's—the—the—curse of Yig?'

She could feel him tremble.

'No, gal, I don't reckon he comes that way.' He's shapen like a man, except ye look at him clost. That's what Chief Grey Eagle says. This here's some varmint come in outen the cold—not crickets, I calc'late, but summat like 'em. I'd orter git up and stomp 'em out afore they make much head-way or git at the cupboard.'

He rose, felt for the lantern that hung within easy reach, and rattled the tin match-box nailed to the wall beside it. Audrey sat up in bed and watched the flare of the match grow into the steady glow of the lantern. Then, as their eyes began to take in the whole of the room, the crude rafters shook with the frenzy of their simultaneous shriek. For the flat, rocky floor, revealed in the new-born illumination, was one seething brown-speckled mass of wriggling rattlesnakes, slithering towards the fire, and even now turning their loathsome heads to menace the fright-blasted lantern-bearer.

It was only for an instant that Audrey saw the things. The reptiles were of every size, of uncountable numbers, and apparently of several varieties; and even as she looked, two or three of them reared their heads as if to strike at Walker. She did not faint—it was Walker's crash to the floor that extinguished the lantern and plunged her into blackness. He had not screamed a second time—fright had paralysed him, and he fell as if shot by a silent arrow from no mortal's bow. To Audrey, the entire world seemed to whirl about fantastically, mingling with the nightmare from which she had started.

Voluntary motion of any sort was impossible, for will and the sense of reality had left her. She fell back inertly on her pillow, hoping that she would wake soon. No actual sense of what had happened penetrated her mind for some time. Then, little by little, the suspicion that she was really awake began to dawn on her; and she was convulsed with a mounting blend of panic and grief which made her long to shriek out despite the inhibiting spell which kept her mute.

Walker was gone and she had not been able to help him. He had died of snakes, just as the old witch-woman had predicted when he was a little boy. Poor Wolf had not been able to help, either—probably, he had not even awakened from his senile stupor. And now the crawling things must be coming for her, writhing closer and closer every moment in the dark, perhaps even now twining slipperily about the bedposts and oozing up over the coarse woollen blankets. Unconsciously she crept under the clothes and trembled.

It must be the curse of Yig. He had sent his monstrous

children on All Hallows Night, and they had taken Walker first. Why was that—wasn't he innocent enough? Why not come straight for her—hadn't she killed those little rattlers alone? Then she thought of the curse's form as told by the Indians. She wouldn't be killed—just turned to a spotted snake. Ugh! So she would be like those things she had glimpsed on the floor—those things which Yig had sent to get her and enrol her among their number! She tried to mumble a charm that Walker had taught her, but she found she could not utter a single sound.

The noisy ticking of the alarm clock sounded above the maddening beat of the distant tom-toms. The snakes were taking a long time—did they mean to delay on purpose to play on her nerves? Every now and then she thought she felt a stealthy, insidious pressure on the bedclothes, but each time it turned out to be only the automatic twitching of her overwrought nerves. The clock ticked on in the dark, and a change came slowly over her thoughts.

Those snakes *couldn't* have taken so long! They couldn't be Yig's messengers after all, but just natural rattlers that were nested below the rock and had been drawn there by the fire. They weren't coming for her perhaps—perhaps they had sated themselves on poor Walker. Where were they now? Gone? Coiled by the fire? Still crawling over the prone corpse of their victim? The clock ticked and the distant drums throbbed on.

At the thought of her husband's body lying there in the pitch blackness a thrill of purely physical horror passed over Audrey. That story of Sally Compton's about the man back in Scott County; he, too, had been bitten by a whole bunch of rattlesnakes, and what had happened to him? The poison had rotted the flesh, and swelled the whole corpse, and in the end the bloated thing had *burst* horribly—burst horribly with a detestable *popping* noise. Was that what was happening to Walker down there on the rock floor? Instinctively she felt that she had begun to *listen* for something too terrible even to name to herself.

The clock ticked on, keeping a kind of mocking-sardonic time with the far-off drumming that the nightwind brought.

She wished it were a striking clock, so that she could know how long this eldritch vigil must last. She cursed the toughness of fibre that kept her from fainting, and wondered what sort of relief the dawn would bring, after all. Probably neighbours would pass—no doubt somebody would call—would they find her still sane? Was she still sane now?

Morbidly listening, Audrey all at once became aware of something which she had to verify with every effort of her will before she could believe it; and which, once verified, she did not know whether to welcome or dread. *The distant beating of the Indian tom-toms had ceased.* They had always maddened her—but had not Walker regarded them as a bulwark against nameless evil from outside the universe? What were some of those things he had repeated to her in whispers after talking with Grey Eagle and the Wichita medicine men?

She did not relish this new and sudden silence, after all. There was something sinister about it. The loud-ticking clock seemed abnormal in its new loneliness. Capable at last of conscious movement, she shook the covers from her face, and looked into the darkness toward the window. It must have cleared after the moon set, for she saw the square aperture distinctly against the background of stars.

Then without warning came that shocking, unutterable sound—ugh!—that dull putrid *pop* of cleft skin and escaping poison in the dark. God!—Sally's story—that obscene stench, and this gnawing, clawing silence! It was too much. The bonds of muteness snapped, and the black night waxed reverberant with Audrey's screams of stark unbridled frenzy.

Consciousness did not pass away with the shock. How merciful if only it had! Amidst the echoes of her shrieking, Audrey still saw the star-sprinkled square of window ahead, and heard the doom-boding ticking of that frightful clock. Did she hear another sound? Was that square window still a perfect square? She was in no condition to weigh the evidence of her senses or distinguish between fact and hallucination.

No—that window was not a perfect square. *Something had encroached on the lower edge.* Nor was the ticking of the

clock the only sound in the room. There was, beyond dispute, a heavy breathing neither her own nor poor Wolf's. Wolf slept very silently, and his wakeful wheezing was unmistakable. Then Audrey saw against the stars the black demoniac silhouette of something anthropoid—the undulant bulk of a gigantic head and shoulders fumbling slowly towards her.

'Y'aaaah! Y'aaah! Go away! Go away! Go away, snake devil! Go 'way, Yig! I didn't want to kill 'em—I was feered he'd be scairt of 'em. Don't, Yig, don't! I didn't go for to hurt yore chillen—don't come nigh me! Don't change me into no spotted snake!'

But the half-formless head and shoulders only lurched onward toward the bed, very silently. Everything snapped at once inside Audrey's head, and in a second she had turned from a cowering child into a raging madwoman. She knew where the axe was—hung against the wall on those pegs near the lantern. It was within easy reach, and she could find it in the dark. Before she was conscious of anything further it was in her hands, and she was creeping towards the foot of the bed—towards the monstrous head and shoulders that every moment groped their way nearer. Had there been any light, the look on her face would not have been pleasant to see.

'Take *that*, you! And *that*, and *that*, and *that*!'

She was laughing shrilly now, and her cackles mounted higher as she saw that the starlight beyond the window was yielding to the dim prophetic pallor of coming dawn.

Dr. McNeill wiped the perspiration from his forehead and put on his glasses again. I waited for him to resume, and as he kept silence, I spoke softly.

'She lived? She was found? Was it ever explained?'

The doctor cleared his throat.

'Yes—she lived, in a way. And it was explained. I told you there was no bewitchment—only cruel, pitiful, material horror.'

It was Sally Compton who had made the discovery. She had ridden over to the Davis cabin the next afternoon to talk over the party with Audrey, and had seen no smoke

from the chimney. That was queer. It had turned very warm again, yet Audrey was usually cooking something at that hour. The mules were making hungry-sounding noises in the barn, and there was no sign of old Wolf sunning himself in the accustomed spot by the door.

Altogether, Sally did not like the look of the place, so was very timid and hesitant as she dismounted and knocked. She got no answer, but waited some time before trying the crude door of split logs. The lock, it appeared, was unfastened; and she slowly pushed her way in. Then, perceiving what was there, she reeled back, gasped, and clung to the jamb to preserve her balance.

A terrible odour had welled out as she opened the door, but that was not what had stunned her. It was what she had seen. For within that shadowy cabin monstrous things had happened and three shocking objects remained upon the floor to awe and baffle the beholder.

Near the burned-out fireplace was the great dog—purple decay on the skin left bare by mange and old age, and the whole carcass burst by the puffing effect of rattlesnake poison. It must have been bitten by a veritable legion of the reptiles.

To the right of the door was the axe-hacked remnant of what had been a man—clad in a nightshirt, and with the shattered bulk of a lantern clenched in one hand. *He was totally free from any sign of snake-bite.* Near him lay the ensanguined axe, carelessly discarded.

And, wriggling flat on the floor, was a loathsome vacant-eyed thing that had been a woman, but was now only a mute, mad caricature. All that this thing could do was to hiss, and hiss, and hiss.

Both the doctor and I were brushing cold drops from our foreheads by this time. He poured something from a flask on his desk, took a nip and handed another glass to me. I could only suggest tremulously and rather stupidly:

‘So Walker had only fainted, that first time—the screams roused him, and the axe did the rest?’

‘Yes.’ Dr. McNeill’s voice was low. ‘But he met his death from snakes just the same. It was his fear working

in two ways—it made him faint, and it made him fill his wife with the wild stories that caused her to strike out when she thought she saw the snake devil.'

I thought for a moment.

'And Audrey—wasn't it queer how the curse of Yig seemed to work itself out on her? I suppose the impression of hissing snakes had been fairly ground into her?'

'Yes. There were lucid spells at first, but they got to be fewer and fewer. Her hair came white at the roots as it grew and later began to fall out. The skin grew blotchy and when she died . . .'

I interrupted with a start.

'*Died?* Then what was that—that thing downstairs?'

McNeill spoke gravely.

'*That* is what was born to her three quarters of a year afterward. There were three more of them—two were even worse—but this is the only one that lived.'

THE WAY HE DIED

GUY PRESTON

THERE was blood on the stairs . . . and a scent of hyacinths. He could see it—smell it—even as those others had done when they had burst in the front door so long ago.

Mr. Grace stood on the first landing, peering down the steep marble flight to that spot in the hall below where the boy's body had lain. There was a queer expression on his saturnine white face and his small evil eyes glinted cruelly. He hoped it had hurt him—that slithering headlong fall before extinction! It served him right for so abruptly cheating him of a subject for his experiments.

Mr. Grace clenched his long white hands in a gesture of sudden fury—clenched them until he winced as the sharp nails bit. Ah, the ecstasy of pain! It had ever been the breath of life to him. To inflict suffering so exquisite, so subtle that the object of his attentions might scream for death. But that the blind boy, tormented to distraction, should have hurled himself downstairs in a frantic endeavour to escape, was an exit as unexpected to Mr. Grace as it was inconvenient.

He frowned, thinking of the time which had elapsed since that inconsiderate lad Gregory Whitstable had eluded him.

Thirty years! Thirty dreary years, during which he had been alone in this gaunt old house with no living creature upon whose shrinking body he might perfect his already considerable skill!

Mr. Grace caressed his narrow chin meditatively, gloating over past memories. Lord, how he'd made that miserable little beast squirm; how he'd shrieked and groaned and grovelled and prayed for mercy, up there in that small dark room at the top of the house.

The torture chamber! That was what Gregory had called it—or the experimental-room as Mr. Grace himself preferred it. The single window was still barred as it had been in the old days—a wise precaution when there was a hand to be flayed or the nerve of a tooth to be prodded and laid bare. The old instruments still lined the damp walls and littered the uncarpeted floor in the centre of the room—relics and reproductions of the time of the Inquisition.

Mr. Grace chuckled and nodded crazily to himself as his memories jostled one another for notice. Ever since he had hanged himself from the banisters in that sudden fit of frenzy following Gregory's death, his memories were all he had left.

He began to mince delicately up and down the long winding corridors; pausing from time to time to preen himself as was his habit in life before one of the cracked mirrors, or to spray his coat lapels in ghastly pantomime with perfume from a tiny cut-glass bottle. Pressing the rubber bulb he inhaled deeply, with an air of almost feminine enjoyment.

Hyacinths! Yes, it was the same scent that he had used that night when the boy had rebelled and called him mad!

'Mad, forsooth!'

Mr. Grace snorted with indignation, recalling the insult. Why, it was the height of civilisation to inflict pain on pain so that one's humdrum existence seemed all the sweeter by contrast—any fool knew that!

If only some one with an intellect on a par with his own would take up his abode in this now deserted mansion—how eagerly he would welcome the diversion. Life, or ought he not perhaps to say *death*, was becoming exceedingly irksome, after thirty years' complete loneliness. Indeed, the only persons who had ventured into the building since the police had departed, were a tiresome psychic research worker with his woman friend who had persisted in crediting all his attempts at communication to some one called 'Mimi'!

Mr. Grace pursed his lips thoughtfully, remembering this. Of course all that was a long time ago—before he had learned to adapt himself properly to his new state. A casual caller would find things very different now. There were

tricks which he had discovered of recent years whose application would leave little doubt as to his identity. For instance, there was that newly-perfected feat of materialisation—to say nothing of the assumption of other shapes . . . yes, his art was on a higher plane than ever, now that he had discarded his mortal body! Now he could torture an intellect—strike pain to the mind—lay limitless *imagination* itself on the rack.

Somewhere in the still house, a window was rattling. Locating the spot, Mr. Grace minced up to it and peered out over the moor.

It was stormy outside, just as it had done on the night when he had died. He wondered if that was why he felt so exceptionally fidgety to-night—because the elements were doing for him unconsciously exactly what the police so often did consciously—reconstructing the scene of the crime. The thought tickled and Mr. Grace cackled thinly.

The wind howled lugubriously over the moorland waste; whistling through the bushes, tearing at the creepers, and buffeting the windows with futile fists. It screamed and cursed its way savagely over the high conical roof of the tall grim house and thundered on, gust following gust like the mad charge of an army of frenzied giants. The house quivered and shook in its foundations. Somewhere a loosened slate crashed, and Mr. Grace's tight lips shrank back over yellow teeth in a ghastly grin. How he would have enjoyed sending that accursed boy up on the roof to repair the damage—Gregory was always so terrified of heights.

Rain—torrents of it—lashing down from the sky like little silver whips in the fitful moonlight; gurgling along the gutters with the noise of a death-rattle; overflowing and splashing down on to the sill in a jigging, shimmering cascade.

Suddenly Mr. Grace stiffened and looked down. A clear patch in the scudding clouds lightened the blackness masking the garden path. He hissed softly and drew back.

Some one was hurrying up it towards the house, picking his way hastily over the overgrown morass with head down and coat-collar up

Furtively he felt for the scent bottle with curiously trem-

bling fingers, then he minced to the head of the staircase. 'A visitor,' he purred into the darkness. '*At last!*' He would meet the stranger in.

* * * *

Morley stood in the hall. He held himself quite still, letting his eyes accustom themselves to the sable gloom while the raindrops from his waterproof spattered the dusty floor.

Of course he had been a fool to come here—especially on a night like this—but he loved to disprove the existence of alleged haunted houses, and to-night was his only opportunity. To-morrow his business called him back to London.

He had heard about 'The Firs' while staying at the Belhampton Arms down in the neighbouring village. Indeed, for the greater part of this evening the bar-gossip had been almost entirely of the supernatural. Morley had argued logic and commonsense but to no purpose, until at last, a little heated with liquor, he had accepted a challenge to spend a night alone in the late Mr. Grace's isolated mansion. Now, wet through and thoroughly sobered, he heartily cursed his precipitancy. Although there were no such things as ghosts, there was certainly a cold to be caught before morning, and the packet of sandwiches which he had brought with him were sodden to the texture of a thick paste.

Disgustedly, he withdrew them from his pocket, and dropped them at his feet. They fell like lead. He was glad that he had had the foresight to bribe Tom and Bob, the two potmen at the inn, to bring him some breakfast and tea in a thermos flask at seven-thirty.

The house was very silent—silent and dark—without even the scampering of rats in the wainscoting to disturb the almost deathly stillness. Gradually as his eyes grew acclimatised to the lack of light, various objects became dimly visible. He could see the great newel posts at the head of the marble stairs, the shadowy outline of a door to right and left of the hall. To the right of the staircase, loomed only a dense black void, which correctly he presumed to be a passage to the kitchen.

Words began to form haphazard in his brain. Eerie—malevolent—horrible—fear—*fear!* Somewhere a dull monot-

onous beating was sounding like muffled tom-toms. He knew it was his heart.

Why was his heart beating like that? What was the matter with him? He was Arthur Morley, a sane intelligent man, who didn't believe in ghosts and suchlike tomfoolery. He had come to prove it . . . and yet . . .

A sudden unaccountable loathing of the house came over him and he wanted to run. He knew what that meant and he was both surprised and angry with himself. *He was afraid.*

Why? What in the name of all that was wonderful was there to fear? He clenched his fists, aware that he was on the verge of panic. There was something wrong here—something about this place which was different from those others he had visited. There was something horrible near to him in the atmosphere that he could almost feel. It came over him in waves. He felt repelled—yet fascinated.

Behind him the open door creaked slightly, stirred by the draught from a broken window. With a long-drawn moan it swung slowly back and thundered home into its frame. The shock of the impact echoed strangely in the hollow emptiness and Morley shivered. To his now fully-attuned senses there seemed to be something final about the slamming of that door. Something menacing. Like a gesture.

'Steady!' he muttered, fighting his nerves and, after a moment, he began to advance cautiously to the stairs. At their foot he stopped and sniffed, knitting his brows in puzzlement. A distinct odour of perfume had floated past him in the darkness. It came again. It was almost as though a woman stood near him unseen.

'Steady!' he muttered again, then, recognising the smell. 'Hyacinths!'

Queer! He began to argue with himself.

There must be some conservatory in the house which he had failed to see from the door. Probably one of the yokels, knowing that the place was empty had annexed it for his own use. Funny that he hadn't noticed it before!

As he mounted the stairs, feeling his way cautiously, the smell grew fainter and Morley clucked with satisfaction to think his deduction was correct. A conservatory, of course!

They were always built on the ground floor round about this district.

It was at the end of the passage on the first floor that Morley found the room which the landlord of the Belhampton Arms had assured him was still furnished as a bedroom. It was a gloomy apartment, but the man had not lied! The furniture, though indescribably dusty, was still serviceable. Morley produced half a candle from his pocket and stuck it on the mantelpiece, then removing his boots he stretched himself out on a dilapidated couch. He would try to sleep.

While he lay there he reasoned with himself. What a fool he'd been to allow himself to get panicky down in the hall—shivering all over like a frightened mare! Why he might have been a schoolgirl to show such abject funk over nothing! True, there had been a distinct impression of evil lurking in the atmosphere—but he had created a monster out of a mere suggestion by the sheer force of his own imagination. He decided that he must have drunk too much at the inn before starting out, and determined to watch himself more carefully the next time he went ghost hunting.

There was something reassuring about this small back bedroom. It had a wholesome air, despite its appearance of neglect.

Morley gave a grunt of content. After all, there were but a few more hours to wait until morning, and then he could hold up his head, both among his friends and to himself, as the champion spook-eliminator of the age! He turned over on his side. The candle-end grew smaller . . . smaller . . .

Clump. Clump. Clump.

Some one was walking about in the room overhead. Morley sat up taut, listening. He must have been asleep!

There it came again.

Clump—clump—clump—and a sound like a winch being turned.

Pinching out the remains of the candle wick, Morley tiptoed to the door in stockinged feet, and out on to the landing. One of the boys from the inn was up there playing a game with him—that was it! It was just the sort of

damfool trick one might expect from a bunch of village hobbledehoys.

He called out sharply :

' All right, you ass—come down! You can't fool me! '

The next instant his heart froze.

The winch turned twice and an agonised scream rent the air. Followed a high-pitched throaty chuckle and a sound of sobbing—bitter, anguished. Something slumped heavily on the floor above and an iron was raked among cinders. A voice moaned pitifully—' My eyes! Oh—my eyes! '

Then silence. Utter and complete.

Shaken, Morley cast round for a weapon. If this was a joke, then it was in mighty poor taste. If not . . .

In any case, it called for investigation.

A pile of brass stairrods was heaped in a corner by the door. He picked one up and swung it. It would do.

Slowly he advanced up the stairs to the floor above.

He was at the top of the house now—he could hear the rain-drops pattering on the roof, though the gale had subsided while he slept. He peered keenly through the darkness, searching the corridor for flitting shadows denser than the night. There was nothing.

The sounds had come from the room directly over his head, and he knew that that would lie at the end of the passage. Grasping his rod more firmly in his hand, Morley crept noiselessly forward.

Suddenly he checked and drew a deep breath, his heart thumping queerly in his breast. Some one was in the house with him. From the base of a heavy oak door a thin beam of light protruded and as Morley noticed it he breathed once more that sickly cloying scent of hyacinths.

He stood stock-still, his eyes staring fixedly at that glimmering yellow streak, while from behind the door came a low whimpering cry—pitiful, broken—abject—like the moan of a beaten dog.

For a moment he was powerless. He could only listen, sick with a growing fear that gnawed his heart while that dreadful sound continued. There was something inhuman about it—something horrible.

The waves of perfume grew stronger, beating against him as he breathed like a wall of poison-gas, suffocating him. A vague movement disentangled itself from the darkness beside him, and there came a sibilant hissing as though someone was working a scentspray close to his face. He tried to speak but the overpowering perfume rushed into his lungs. He found himself choking . . . choking . . .

Some one chuckled softly close to his ear. Morley wheeled abruptly. His metal rod whistled through space—once—twice—thrice. He felt a crawling sensation race up his spine to the base of his skull. There was something near him in the darkness—something he couldn't see—something indescribably evil—gloating—gloating.

Light—he must have a light! His every instinct craved for it. There was a light in the room before him, and he flung himself at the door. The knob turned easily.

Morley found himself gasping on the threshold of a dimly-lit chamber—a chamber that seemed to derive from the Middle Ages. There was a coke fire with irons heating in it, a rack, an Iron Virgin, and thumb-screws. There were other instruments, too, which flashed for a moment before his blurred vision—then the light flickered out and the glow from the fire grew dim.

Something brushed the side of his leg. Morley glanced swiftly down, then his nerve snapped for good. A shape was writhing on the floor beside him—white and spidery like a starved corpse. Groping, it reached out to him with one hand while it dragged itself painfully along with the other. It lifted its face . . .

With a wild cry of terror Morley turned and fled—up the black, heavily scented corridor and down the steep marble stairs. His eyes stared, his limbs mechanically obeying the primitive urge of fear—fear, stark and unrestrained.

There was a pursuer behind him. He could hear it, feel it—that *horror*—as it slumped and floundered close at his heels like a blind monster bat beating the walls to get out.

It was gaining! Gaining with every stride! And it was mad. *Mad!*

Morley leaped in terror for the top of the last flight. At its foot lay the door—and freedom.

Something touched him—plucked at his feet as he ran. He tripped.

* * * *

Tom and Bob arriving with breakfast from the inn paused on the threshold of 'The Firs.' The heavy oak door was closed, and the tall narrow house thrust upwards above it like a mocking forefinger gibing at God. All around spread a grey vista of sodden moorland, faintly iridescent under the pale rays of an April sun.

'It must be thirty years ago to-day since I stood on these 'ere steps,' remarked the former thoughtfully. 'You were only a baby, then.'

Bob nodded sullenly.

'Aye, but I mind the tale. It were you as cut the old man down and old Jonas Lantwit as found the lad 'umped up in the 'all. A sad business!'

'A devilish business!' Tom's blue eyes gleamed with savage recollection. 'Burnt out the poor boy's peepers, did the old devil, so that 'e fell from top to bottom of the stairs trying to escape. No wonder none but zanies and Lunnon-folk come nigh the place—'tis unholy!'

Bob clucked pensively and shook his head.

'It fair makes me shiver,' he agreed, eyeing the door askance. 'And to think that Mr. Morley 'as been 'ere all night!'

He pushed it open with his foot and called loudly. At the same time Tom thrust past him into the hall with a cry.

There at the foot of the wide marble staircase lay the body of a man. There was a gash in the forehead where the head had struck a knife-sharp corner of stone. He was plainly dead.

Tom stooped and raised the figure in his arms.

'Mr. Morley!' he gasped, then his eyes dilated and he seemed to be living thirty years back.

There was blood on the stairs—and the air was heavy with the scent of hyacinths.

THE CHAIN

H. WARNER MUNN

His first sensation when he groaned back to consciousness, was that of bitter and intense cold. Then becoming fully awake, he was aware of grinding pains in his body, as though each bone and muscle owned a separate ache. He shivered convulsively and opened his eyes.

It was very dark and he could see nothing around him, but high above there gleamed for a second a lurid ruddy glare, which flickered like leaping flames, then vanished—accompanied by a clang of metal, as though a furnace door had been opened and closed.

Puzzled, he listened, but could hear no sounds except a far, faint crackling like hemlock boughs snapping in a gale. His eyes ached with the strain of watching, and he closed them, too weary to move.

Where was he? Surely he must be dreaming in his bed at the castle of Rutzau, owned by his cousin Franz, and yet he seemed to be awake.

Ah, Franz the blockhead, Franz the cuckold; yet Franz the lucky, for he was fortunate—Franz with the beautiful wife!

What a joke it was on Franz, to be sure, that he should thus entertain his wife's lover so unsuspectingly! Perhaps his wits had been addled as well as his body smashed when Franz had fallen from the cliff two years before. And the cream of the jest was that Franz had never known how the accident had come about, but still believed that the edge of the cliff had crumbled away beneath him!

How could a man be such a fool and live? No wonder that Olga despised her husband now!

The man chuckled at the thought and sneezed violently.

He must be taking cold; how came it that the bed was so damp—and hard?

He rolled over, and his hands came in contact with rock—bare, icy and wet. He was shocked wide awake at once. Where, in God's name, could he be?

Abruptly horror surged around in the dark and left him trembling.

Rock! Wet stone! Half forgotten tales from the black history of Rutzau swarmed through his head.

If ever a castle were haunted by ghosts, it should be Rutzau, if even a third of the stories that had been whispered about its torture-chambers were true. Rumour spoke, with hushed breath and backward-roving eye, of deep pits and rooms cut out in the solid rock that formed the castle's foundations; murmured, too, of men that had entered the castle and had never returned—as men; told also of others who were not seen again, and guessed darkly at the reason; mentioned tortures under which men prayed to be placed upon the rack instead, regarding it as a pleasanter couch than the bed of pain they lay upon.

Also there were whispers regarding the rooms where dwelt the Iron Maiden, ever ready with insatiable crushing embrace for any victim; other rooms where the strappado, thumb-screws and the boot wrung truth, or anything that the master of Rutzau wished to know, from lying tongues that would not reply to minor tortures, but answered eagerly, hoping their reward would be quick death, as they underwent the Greater Question.

He had heard, too, of the oubliette, a pit with walls of sheer stone, peopled by rats, fierce with hunger, to which men were flung living.

Could he be in the dungeons of Rutzau? Did Franz *know*?

He staggered to his feet, swaying with faintness. Again that lurid flare overhead, followed by the ominous clang, as though someone stoked a furnace in the air.

He began to run in the dark, drunkenly weaving from side to side. Almost at once he felt the impact of a tremendous blow upon his entire body, and he was hurled backwards, striking his head cruelly upon the ground.

Like a dog which has received an unexpected kick, he yelped with the pain and, upon hands and knees, scuttled crabside backwards. Soon he encountered another obstacle with his heels, which resisted further progress and he stood up, reaching as high as possible with his hands. Nothing projected from the wall, which was smooth and slippery to the touch as his exploring fingers passed over its damp surface.

The wall was gently curved and, keeping his left hand upon it, he set out to follow whither it might lead him. He had taken nine steps when his hand plunged into vacancy and he stumbled.

The recess in the wall was not deep but it was already occupied by a furry body that squealed and writhed under his hand and squirmed when he gripped it, setting sharp teeth into his hand. He jerked his hand out of the hole, with the creature hanging from his thumb, holding tight with teeth and claws and a prehensile tail that wound tightly about his wrist.

With his other hand he loosened the claws one at a time, which fastened elsewhere while the teeth went on gnawing hungrily. Half-crazed he fought the thing that seemed bent on eating him in small mouthfuls, snarling while it chewed. He screeched like a beast when the teeth met through the fleshy portion of his hand and tore a bit away.

With his free hand he clutched the thing by the back and ripped it loose, battering it on the floor until it wriggled no longer; but his furious rage was not satisfied until he had torn it into ragged halves and hurled them, wet and flapping, from him.

He stood, breathing hard in great gasps, and something began to fight with another something not far away in the dark, squealing little wicked cries.

Something ran across his bare feet, and he kicked at it, but struck the wall instead. He cursed vehemently and, limping, resumed his journey along the wall. The wall was on his left, the clamour of a bloody quarrel on his right. Yet, as he advanced, the row did not lessen with distance, but continued undiminished, so that an ugly worm of fear began

to crawl in his brain—a thought which he dared not allow himself to dwell upon.

When his hand again entered an opening in the wall, and the squabbling over the dead beast was no farther away, he could no longer deny the fearful fact. He was in the oubliette!

For the third time the lights glowed red from an unseen fire, and again followed that solemn boom like a funeral bell tolling dismally—one—a long pause—two and three—and from above a shower of small glittering particles rained down—a sparkling hail.

Many went dark before they reached the floor, but others, larger than the rest, shone like fireflies as they fell; and stretching out his hand, he caught one on his palm.

With a cry of pain he dropped it. It was a hot coal, a red ember that stuck to his hand and hissed.

Then through the darkness of the pit, from high in air, floated down a sardonic chuckle; instantly, without a second's warning, the pit was flooded with light from invisible sources, which revealed to the man after the first blinding glare had passed, the horror of his prison.

For a hundred feet the walls of the pit rose sheer and smooth, with neither crack nor cranny for a foothold. About four feet from the floor, several openings pierced the rock, and into them were tumbling in a headlong scramble grey shapes as large as cats, round-eared and gaunt, their pointed snouts blood-dabbled from the cannibal feast, and in the centre of the floor lay in fragments what had been a huge rat.

High above, a cripple stumped about the edge of the oubliette; the man below knew it was his cousin, his heart saying gloomily, 'Franz knows!'

Franz lay down and swung an arm over the pit's edge—an arm that, curiously short, seemed to have been broken in several places and clumsily reset.

Was he shaking his fist? And then the man below saw that Franz was beckoning to him. Faintly fell a word, 'Climb,' then again 'Climb up the chain' and he saw that from the hidden mysteries above a long beam was swinging out until its end was directly over him

Upon the metal beam there was fixed a pulley, over which ran continuously joined links of iron which now were moving and falling—down.

Slow-dropping, the end of the chain came nearer until his hands could grasp it, and still descended. It touched the floor and stopped, swaying there. As he held to the cold links he could feel the vibration of the engine that had lowered it.

The links were large and heavy, their openings wide enough to insert a hand or foot. He fixed himself comfortably as might be and waited to be lifted from the pit.

How Franz would suffer for this when he got out? Let him taste a little of his own pit, perhaps! And then again from above fell the word 'Climb,' interrupting his pleasant vindictive thoughts.

Perceiving that the cripple did not intend to lift him out, he set his teeth and began to climb the hundred foot of chain. Franz would have his little joke, he thought, but when he got out—an ugly grin—some one else might laugh.

Still he might have to beg for help after all; only half way up now and he did not feel strong.

Why, he had been climbing for hours, it seemed! Strange he was not already at the top towards which he strained.

He glanced below and nearly fell in horror! The floor of the pit, nearly forty feet across, was carpeted with masses of the fallen chain. The chain was being lowered at the same speed at which he was climbing. While he looked below he dropped ten feet nearer the bottom of the pit.

Furiously he began again to climb, regained his ten feet, five feet more, and the chain at an increased rate dropped down.

Above, Franz laughed, but it was more nearly a cackle, and the man below felt hope die within him, for he knew that Franz the cuckold was fully aware, and mad.

'Climb!' he shouted down. 'Climb.'

But the man no longer climbed; holding tight instead, he watched the floor come near.

Fifteen feet from the bottom, the chain was loosened suddenly, then caught, and he fell from it. Before he could

rise, a heavy length of metal lay across his body, pinning him down. His flimsy night-garments tore as he struggled loose.

While he was freeing himself, the chain hung steady without dropping, but when he moved away, the swaying chain followed, guided by the patient cunning of the crazed man above.

The rough metal cut his feet as he walked over it, and he wished for shoes. He kneeled down close to the wall, took off his jacket, and tore it into strips, which he bound about his feet. While he was doing this, the chain was coming slowly down, building heaps of metal which overbalanced and fell dangerously near, but not touching him.

Then as he anxiously sought for some retreat from the growing menace, he saw a slight depression in the wall; he *might* fit himself into this and be safe from a direct blow.

He dived for it and as closely as might be, he flattened himself into the niche and, scarcely breathing, waited. Perhaps Franz had not seen!

The hope was vain, for the chain swung from him and a broad mound of metal links rose, like a titanic mushroom lifting its head before the niche. With the squeal of a trapped animal, he darted from his lair, clawed the chain aside, sprang through the narrowing aperture that was left, and sprawled upon his face.

Before he could scramble erect, something struck his shoulder. The chain was at his side. Already a tremulous pile shook uncertainly above him, about to topple.

He rolled aside as it fell, but not far enough to escape, for an arm was caught. Desperately he pried and struggled to get away, finally pulling loose at the expense of a torn hand.

While he fought, the chain had withdrawn to the other side of the pit and had piled high, terrace-like; tangled, petrified, disjointed snakes. Now when he stood up, it swung towards him again.

He sprang away; the chain followed as he backed towards the wall. He ran; and then began a strange pursuit, for, ever as he fled, at his heels marched like a sentient thing—the Chain.

It poured into the pit, link after link piling upon the others to form vast heaps of metal which would topple and fall. The man wandered helplessly about among these metal tentacles that were thrown out, all but crushed by the heavy coils and mounds that swayed erratically all about him.

Again he slunk behind a heap of metal and mouthed and mowed, gibbering at the chain as it sought him out.

To his tortured mind and feverish imagination the chain, while it swung and created a hill of metal in the centre of the pit, took on a new and monstrous shape. It seemed like a metal giant, its blind head above the clouds, swaying rhythmically from side to side and searching for him in the oubliette. Fumbling about with a hundred clanking arms, it stalked him with a dreadful ghastly patience, for the end it sought. And towering mightily before his hiding-place, it drove him forth again and struck him down with a hundredweight of iron links.

He struggled up once more, clinging to life, bruised and hurt, whining and whimpering now, all pride forgotten. Bitterly he cursed the name of the woman whose fair face had brought him here to walk with Death.

From high overhead came down a malignant sound—the low, quiet tittering of the madman, watching, planning, carefully goading his victim round the pit. The man below looked up, a curse upon his lips in which the name of Franz was mingled—a curse which gave way to a scream of abysmal terror as he realised the inconceivable frightfulness of his approaching doom.

For several yards from the lips of the pit the chain glowed red with heat, and as he watched the links that now came following shone yellow, then white, flaked with black patches of soot on which ran and twinkled tiny racing crowds of sparks in endless chase.

The chain was passing through the roaring furnace above; white-hot and coming down . . .

It touched the colder links and made a pile which he avoided. It swung around the pit and laid a circle around him; swinging still, it formed a narrowing spiral at whose centre he stood shivering with the agony of anticipation. It

neared him, hung steady, then swung quickly at him like the leap of a python. He shrieked and darted aside.

His feet came down on the glowing links and the rags round his feet smoked and burst into flame. Weeping, he tore them away and trod the flaming patch with naked feet.

That which followed was a matter of moments, but to him it seemed a foretaste of eternity spent in punishment.

The chain came slowly down, livid with heat and leprously scaled with oxydised metal, pulsating in ripples along its length from the throbbing engine that lowered it to the floor, building shimmering heaps for his tortured climbing.

Stumbling over scorching ridges, he rounded the pit, limping feebly along over the hideous surface that drove him to his doom. Rest impossible, he tottered on his way, hope as dead within him as in any poor lost soul that crosses with treadmill trot some smoking horizonless plain of hell.

From the walls, cracking with heat, jetted out white puffs of steam but above their piping whistle there rumbled in the man's crazed brain strange roaring voices, and sometimes he vacuously smiled as he listened to the ravings of a mind in dissolution—and plodded on his way. And, though his eyes were clouded and dim, he began to see a vision, and to him the livid swaying chain appeared hazily to be the dancing white body of the woman he loved.

He turned to follow, instead of feeling as before, but she tripped away lightly, mocking, and he could come no nearer, for the maniac above managed his chain so that his prisoner should not be touched by it, thinking perhaps that he had not yet paid fully and would find Death too dear a friend.

The man below was growing unconscious of his pain, mercifully believing with his shattered mind, that he dwelt in happier days, and once he muttered as he stumbled on: 'Oh, Olga, Olga! How your kisses burn!'

He thought he had whispered, but the words burst out in a rasping croak and a gush of blood from a half-cooked lung followed and hissed upon the chain.

Nerves have their limits; they can be strained to a certain point, but beyond that they refuse to function, which in a way is merciful. So it was with the man. The breaking point

had been reached and passed, and his suffering was no longer so intense.

Dying on his charred stumps of feet, he hobbled amid the coils of clanking metal that flowed relentlessly down like a slow thread of lava trickling over the lip of the pit. Occasionally the chain swung in an unexpected direction and laid a fiery tentacle across his shoulders, searing anew an earlier burn; or again he heard through the drumming stutter of the heated blood in his pounding head, the hiss and sharp puff of steam as a white-hot link accidentally pressed against his naked side.

But though he winced and cried out at every motion he was compelled to take, it was more because the cringing seemed by then to be the proper thing, necessary, and a part of the torment, than because of any new agony that he experienced.

He had nearly ceased to think. Now and then, while he reeled and staggered over the loosely shifting heaps that illuminated the pit with a ruddy light, a groan of relief hissed through his baked lips as the dull brain told the cracking body that the end must be very near.

Once he thought he heard a cry far away, and not repeated. The voice seemed familiar; it was in fact the yell of the maniac who was dancing around the rim of the pit, perilously near but wary of his own trap and shrieking down curses at his enemy.

Only the one sound had pierced to the seat of memory, but it was enough to cause the man to hope again. Perhaps Franz, the merciless, had relented!

He summoned his lagging energies and tried to speak, but the sound that issued from the throat was only a gurgle. Again he tried; it was agony even to breathe; a harsh, inarticulate croak, in which were only fragments of words, was the only result, and his deafened ears refused to carry the answer.

Hope died and a more bitter despair took its place. The reaction produced an even keener torture, if such were possible. It was almost as though a lost soul, who knew him-

self to be in the deepest chamber of hell, felt the floor drop from beneath him and precipitate him still further down.

He struggled on beneath the iron flails, through a misty haze of smoke, a fog of sooty vapour from his own smouldering body, a stench hanging about him not merely of burned flesh but, even more repulsive, the repugnant odour of charred bone; and the demon above forgot to yell in his wonder that life could linger so long in such a mutilated being.

And still the dead man walked and stumbled, mechanically complaining his inhuman, querulous moans, glaring straight ahead, though his eyeballs were seared with the heat.

The horror could not long continue. Inevitably the moment came when he could not avoid the moving pillar of shining metal. Blind hands stretched before him, feeling his way forward, one hand and arm passed by the chain and the other arm upon its other side. Just before his face touched the glowing link he realised his mistake, but not in time to dodge the blow, and the link covered his face like a brand.

For a second he was conscious of a terrible withering heat, an intolerable piercing glare that beat into his brain like jagged arrows—and then reason fled. With it passed any sense of pain, and a numbness that felt chill in that place of fire stole round his heart like a caress.

He crept aimlessly for a few feet on hands and knees, stiffened, rolled upon his side, and placed his bleeding head upon his charred arm quite naturally as though he had laid him down to sleep upon soft grasses instead of a bed of fire. Yet so indomitable is the will to live that still one fingerless hand dabbed feebly at the chain for a space, although his brain was dead within him.

And, no longer swaying, but descending evenly, the chain dropped upon him and buried him from sight.

Up through the interstices of the glowing heap of metal thick smoke seeped, black and heavy, drifting lazily in the currents of the heat that danced in the pit. The chain cooled and shrank, contracting with now and then a jangle of links slipping into new positions, and a hollow commenced to take place upon its surface.

And as the smoke diminished from this trough, coffin-like in shape, gorgeous colours shimmered along the hollow, melting into new forms and shades like the rainbow hues of oil on water—crimson and green and blue.

High overhead—beside the roaring furnace—the low, nervous tittering of a madman!

Then in the myriad cells of water-soaked rock the steam expanded until the pressure was irresistible. A rending shock, and a crack, jagged and growing wider, crept on the walls. The castle quivered to its highest spire.

Still the madman tittered his mechanical laugh.

Then the walls caved in, the furnace dropped into the abyss like a live coal falling from a grate and the ceiling fell.

The castle of Rutzau would no longer menace the peasants of the valley. It and the pit of torment were no more.

ISLAND OF DOOM

BASSETT MORGAN

WHEN Tom Mansey's schooner dropped anchor in the pretty lagoon and he set out in a small boat for shore, he saw the colour of a woman's dress as Nell Evans ran down the path to meet him, followed a moment later by her tall husband.

As his boat, sculled by a Tonga boy of his crew, slipped over the clear water and tinted coral gardens below, he had time to see the amazing improvements that Evans had made in a year on the island foreshore, hedges of flowering shrubs, crushed coral path leading to a pretty bungalow built of coral, blocks and chunks of lava rocks brought from the slope of that extinct volcano which reared its brown crest like the cowed head of a monk brooding in the distance.

Then Mansey was startled to see Nell Evans emerge from the hedge leading by one paw a young orang-utan which shrunk closer to her side at the sight of strangers. In the enthusiastic warmth of greetings from Evans and his wife, who had not seen a white man since Mansey dropped them and their belongings on the island a year ago, the orang-utan broke away and scuttled to the house. Mansey was no sooner settled in a porch chair and answering the hundreds of questions fired at him in wistful hunger of exiles marooned at the back of beyond, than the orang-utan came from the house carrying a tray with glasses and a bottle.

Bill Evans roared with laughter at Mansey's dumbfounded expression.

'I caught him the week after you left us, and Nell has trained him as a housemaid,' he said.

'Bill is away so much of the time fussing with his experiments that I was lonely,' Nell said defensively. 'I always spoiled our cats and dogs at home. I trained gold-fish to swim through my fingers. Our canaries could put on a very good

entertainment of tricks I taught them. And I couldn't resist little Willie.'

The ape stood patiently while Evans uncorked the bottle and poured drinks; then he carried the tray to Nell and Bill and Mansey.

'Making a henpeck and sissy of Little Willie saved her teaching me to jump when she spoke,' laughed Evans.

Mansey did not like the idea of the great ape being a companion for Nell Evans, but then he would never have brought a pretty and intelligent young wife to this far-away tip of a submerged mountain peak far out of the track of cargo boats or even native craft, which will go anywhere at a price. For undisturbed quiet in which Bill Evans could pursue his biological and anatomical studies it was ideal, fair as a garden of the Lord and lacking none of the potentialities of hell. Evans had inherited wealth enough to make him independent, had been a successful surgeon who resented catering to the usual neurotic crowd among a physician's patients, and broke away to experiment with anatomy in the raw.

The company for which Mansey was a valued freelance scout, flying squadron and riot officer, gave the Evanses into his charge and he made a thorough job of finding a place where they could pursue Evans' hobby unmolested.

An hour after he landed, Mansey realised it was not too lonely a place. Bill Evans took him to a crocodile pool he had made and furnished with baby muggers, surrounded by ferns and rock walls that protected a shallow beach.

Small snouts rested on floating logs or shore roots. But on shore three little crocs humped their backs and began to pick at grain which Evans scattered, then tried to scratch, for all the world like hens in a barnyard, making odd noises in their leathery throats. Mansey laughed and asked what ailed them, then stared.

'Neither bird nor beast nor good red herring,' said Bill Evans. 'I've given a fowl's brains to crawling reptiles. It's a fact,' he added, as Mansey looked incredulous. 'I'd like to try and experiment on a snake and see it try to stand on its tail and crow at the rising sun.'

'Kidding me?' Mansey asked.

'Absolutely not. I transplanted hen brains in those muggers' heads. Birds and reptiles are closely related, you know. I only wish I could live long enough to set the strain.'

'Bill, you'd better come outside again. This sort of thing will send you bugs,' commented Mansey, but Evans smiled.

'Think what surgery could do with this sort of thing,' he said. 'Dink Forster, an old college mate of mine, and I used to try it with various small animals until we managed to have them survive our surgical clumsiness of early days. I've got ideas. Think of planting the brain of a mongoose in the head of a tiger, and lowering the cobra deaths in India, for instance. Only the discrepancy in size must be overcome, smaller tigers or larger mongooses. Come and see my workshop. I built it away from the house because Nell has all a woman's shrinking from the surgical art, although she is for all I try to do.'

They left the pool by a path which led towards a blazing wall of crimson bloom where Little Willie, the young orang-utan stood with a basket containing chunks of meat from wild pigs.

'Fly-trap orchids,' said Evans. 'Cultivated and bred for size and ferocity. Nell trained Little Willie to feed them.'

A stout wall of bamboo supported the trunks of two vines, but their branches had swarmed to trees which were smothered by the parasitic growth. The flowers were prodigious monstrosities, with a petal spread of three feet like curved scarlet leather, black throats from which came a lethal stench that Mansey felt in sudden dizziness, despite the sea wind blowing briskly that morning. The horrible flowers swayed like the wobbling heads of dromedaries or inflated hoods of cobras in the direction of the ape and his basket of meat, which his paw tossed in bits to a black throat. Instantly the petals closed on the meat with a creak like rubbed leather, and a dozen other heads snatched towards that closed maw, their scarlet petals quivering like the jaws of a cat stalking a bird. They even darted at the ape, which moved nimbly from that touch.

'They can draw blood,' commented Evans, 'as Little Willie found out long ago. I don't dare let those things

propagate, or they'd kill all animal life on the island in time. I keep two roots and burn the branches I cut off. Look at that ape!'

Little Willie was tormenting a cluster of giant blooms by waving a larger chunk of meat just beyond their reach. A mass of flowers shot out, and the massive bamboo creaked with the strain before the ape tossed it and they writhed in horrible combat close to the parent stem. Little Willie's jaws opened in a weird grin and cackle of monkey mirth. Mansey saw the stems, thick as a man's leg, pulsing between closed blooms that hung like yellow gourds, as the flesh was absorbed.

'It's beastly, and I don't see what it proves,' said Mansey.

'Every man has his own hobby,' said Evans. 'The orchids are just a whim of mine. My interest is in animal experiments and a new outlet for surgery. For instance, Dink Forster is back there studying cancer and salvaging a few more months of life for its victims, prolonging misery for people afflicted in various ways and balled because it isn't half the job a junkman could do with old automobiles by taking the good parts and assembling one workable machine. Think, if we could take human wrecks and use the best bits! That's what my surgery is for.'

He started away, and Mansey was glad to leave the vicinity of the monstrous vampire flowers to which Little Willie rapidly tossed the last scraps and left one neglected bud foraging in the empty basket he dropped. He swung after Evans and Mansey, flying through trees of which great branches drooped with his weight, then crashed back when released.

Moist heat on the jungle trail wrapped their faces like warm wet gauze. Mansey dripped sweat before they came to the crater slope on the foot of which stood a coral block building with glass walls on two sides, surrounded by a high fence of bamboo. In the well-equipped operating theatre were heavy cot-beds, smoothly padded and fitted with many binding straps, cases of instruments, all the paraphernalia of a small hospital surgery, and two white-coated Chinese assistants bowed politely as Evans introduced them.

'They attended college in my time,' he said, 'and shared

the brain transplantations with Dink Forster and me. Come and see my latest stunts.' But Mansey shook his head.

'I don't like it,' he said frankly.

Back at the house he bathed and changed his clothes, then sat on the porch with Nell Evans till dinner was prepared by the native servants they had brought with them to the island. Little Willie sat puffing a cigarette, apparently enjoying a smoke. Then his fingers began pleating the hem of Nell's dress. Mansey remembered his own mother and other women picking up an apron to pleat the hem. He noticed after that that every dress Nell wore had those pleat marks from the fingers of the ape, which was devoted to its mistress. He saw Little Willie sweep and wash dishes, dust a room, even straighten a framed picture of Dink Forster which hung on the house wall.

'You've made a girl of Little Willie,' he commented as the ape laid his head on Nell's lap and sighed almost humanly. 'But you should be petting your own son and not that creature. And he should be swinging through trees, frightening smaller monkeys and picking his own fleas.'

Nell laughed, but it sounded wistful.

'I daren't risk a baby here. And I can't turn Little Willie loose now, You know, of course, that wild apes kill one that has been tamed.'

'Go outside and have a family while Bill is experimenting,' said Mansey brutally. 'Dance and play, for fear the fate of tamed monkeys might be imitated among humans when you do go out.'

'Stop it!' she cried, suddenly, passionately. 'Don't you imagine I have heart-aches enough without you reminding me? Bill will never leave the island. But we need company. I'm tempted to write Dink Forster and tell him what Bill is doing. He'd be wild to come. Only—'

'The very thing,' cried Mansey. 'His opinion would be worth something if he told Bill to cut this crazy experimenting and take you outside.'

'No,' she said quietly, lowering voice. 'Poor Dink! You see, I was once engaged to Dink. I'm not boasting when I say he was pretty wild about me. I eloped with Bill. And if

you knew Dink you'd realise I'm afraid to have them meet. Dink is the kind that never forgets or forgives. Look! ' She led Mansey to his picture on the wall, across which was written 'Till death. Dink.' A handsome clever-looking face, yet passionate and sensual. Recalling Bill Evans' lank, rugged profile, Mansey decided Nell had been wise to choose Bill and to keep the two men apart.

'Nevertheless, I'm so proud of what Bill's doing that I've written Dink a bulky letter telling him about it. You'll post it for me from Port Moresby, please? '

Mansey left the island with a feeling of escape from smouldering peril gathering for a holocaust, a crawling fury due to Evans' tampering with natural forces, a vengeance of beast life hovering ready to pounce. He would rather have dropped Nell's letter in the sea. Some day he hoped he would be bringing out Evans' widow, and he hoped to God it would not be too late to save her reason.

For five consecutive years he called with supplies and came away still more repulsed with the miracles of Evans' surgery; then he saw the shadow lower. Evans wasn't well. Confidentially he gave Mansey a letter to Dink Forster, asking him to come and see what might be done to ward off inroads of an organic trouble, and see for himself Evans' experiments. Perhaps Dink would be interested enough to stay and work with him in cases . . .

'Come outside to a hospital,' urged Mansey.

'And let this work waste? Not while I live. But don't tell Nell. Dink wanted to marry her, and I won out. She thinks Dink will have it in for me. But that was long ago. We outgrow those kind of disappointments.'

Mansey again mailed a letter with forebodings of trouble. Months later, when he reported to company headquarters, they told him a man had been waiting five weeks for his return to take passage on his schooner for the Evans' Island. And when Mansey met Richard Forster, who could write half the alphabet after his name, he knew Nell Evans' instinct had been intuitive.

'So you're the man who has kept me waiting,' he began. 'Well, I'll be on your boat in an hour.'

'I'll send you word when I'm sailing,' said Mansey curtly and turned away. Not even the company dictated in that tone to Tom Mansey, who knew weather, natives and the perils of that stretch of tropic seas. What could be done, Mansey leaped to do. If he shook his head, the matter dropped. Perhaps men died, but they would have died anyway. God seemed far away from some horrors down there.

In three days he sent his Tonga mate for Dr. Forster. The schooner would sail in an hour. When the hour was up Forster had not come. Mansey breathed easier and gave orders to lift the mud-hooks; there was trade along the north shore he very much wanted to pick up, and delay might give Nell Evans a chance to marry again outside and dance as a pretty woman should. Damn these cocksure high-falutin' nabobs of civilisation, telling Tom Mansey what to do and when! Let Forster hire a native craft and swelter in broiling suns at sea, stew under a low thatch by night and find Evans if they could.

His vessel was swinging for the outer sea when Forster sauntered to the wharf, grew excited, waved white-ducked arms and long slender hands, then hired a fuzzy-haired Papuan with a proa to deliver him on Mansey's outgoing schooner. He made intercourse strained, but Mansey was not a talker. He nursed his pipe, and his glance told the Tonga boys what to do. His silence got on Forster's nerves.

'I've been summoned by Evans for professional services.'

'Naturally,' stated Mansey. Red crept up Forster's cheeks.

'You know the Evanses well?'

'Slightly. I call there once a year with supplies.'

'Ever see their tame orang-utan?'

'The yit is full of monkeys,' said Mansey, and he went below to change into pyjamas, damning Dink Forster. Cold calloused exterior. Boiling lava beneath. Like a volcano oozing a thread of vapour to show what lay beneath ready to rouse and blow up everything. Later Forster said:

'Mansey, I began wrong with you. I didn't know you and I'd waited—'

'Six or seven years,—' Mansey finished amazingly.

'It seemed that long.' Forster laughed harshly, but it was

his last attempt to iron out the spiked and bristling wall of suspicion between them.

The weather was fine, the sea by day a shimmering plane on which wind blew so gently that it carried spiced land scents. In the schooner's shadow they could see coral and fish. The nights were purple gauze entangled with low stars. The engine throb was a thudding heart burdened with tragedy. Mansey wished he need not find that tiny dot of an island among the fly-specks of earth mottling those seas. But Nell Evans loved Bill, and she had been such a gamester . . .

His boat arrived in the night, and they went ashore to where lanterns hung on the tiny lagoon wharf, and found Little Willie carrying a light as he stood beside Nell Evans. She greeted Forster with a cry that held an eerie, broken note; then hunger for the sight of some other white person broke down her woman's instinct.

Evans' face had changed with the strides of pain stalking him night and day, and Forster's gaze lingered on him with professional appraisal. Mansey went to the guest-room early, and left them talking of old days, but he awakened at the break of silver dawn to see Forster in pyjamas standing beside his bed.

'Mansey, I've a favour to ask. Start away with me now.'

Mansey considered silently, then shook his head in refusal. He hated cowards. Forster had evidently found he still loved Nell Evans. Let him prove it by saving Bill's life for her.

'Persuade Bill and his wife to go outside with us, and I'll do it,' he countered.

'Honestly, I tried that. They won't go.'

'Then I don't see how you can refuse to help Evans. Isn't it sort of ethical to do what you can professionally?'

Forster turned on his heel and left the room. Nell Evans did not take anything at breakfast but clear coffee, and she was forcing her gaiety, relating college escapades gallantly, leading their laughter. After breakfast Bill and Forster started for the surgery, and Nell sat with Mansey on the porch, looking like a stricken woman, with Little Willie pleading

her dress hem until it got on her nerves and she sent him to feed the vampire orchids with meat.

Mansey followed the ape, watching the horrid feast of flowers on flesh, hearing Little Willie's cackling mirth as he tormented the blooms which writhed to reach the titbit, their stems twisting like pythons and those of the fed bulbs closed on their prey, throbbing in repletion.

Then the ape began cutting upthrust stem buds from the earth, tuberous and blanched. He smoothed the earth and filled his basket with the cuttings, then swung through the trees towards the hill. He performed as much work as any three of the lazy native servants; his body was full-grown, immensely powerful, and his trained intelligence amazing. Mansey heard the voices of Evans and Forster at the crocodile pool, and he joined them, listening quietly to Forster's enthusiastic comments on Evans' experiments.

For days the two surgeons were together in the surgery, and at the pool, and Forster was going even further in brain transplantations than Evans. Little Willie brought small monkeys for their experiments, and Nell Evans shuddered when at last she spoke of it to Mansey.

'Tom, I want a trip outside, while this is going on. I haven't told Bill yet, because he hasn't been well lately, but something has happened which makes me want to go outside for a time. Perhaps Dink Forster will be interested enough to want to stay and go on with this work, and Bill will follow me if I make a home somewhere else, in Sydney or Hongkong. You see, I'm expecting a baby.'

'Why not tell Bill and take him outside with you?' Mansey suggested. He was glad of her decision and of this new interest in her life.

'No. Not yet. Wait till Dink is fascinated enough to take over the work, and I have our home ready. Then Bill will come contentedly and I won't feel I've torn him away.'

Mansey thought another reason drove Nell Evans away. Even he could see plainly the smouldering passion of Forster for the girl who had once jilted him. Even the ape sensed it, and crouched near her, growling at Forster and refusing to make friends, always at his habit of pleating the hem

of her dress, until it got on Nell's nerves and in desperation she hung one of her dresses on a bamboo rack that stood on the porch, so that the ape could pleat the fabric of that garment instead of the one she was wearing.

When Nell spoke of wanting a trip outside, Bill Evans was enthusiastic about the plan.

'You need a change, Nell. You can dance and play around.'

'Suppose I liked it so well I didn't return, could you come and visit me sometimes?' she asked laughingly.

'Don't tempt me. I never could resist you,' he teased, and pressed his hand to her cheek. Forster smoked a cigar vehemently. The Evanses strolled off under the moon and Forster began:

'Nell mustn't know, but Bill is a sick man. I'm glad she is going outside for her confinement. I'll try to do something for Bill while she is gone. She knows about our experiments and it horrifies her, so she is better away just now. I don't think she should be so much in the power of that ape. Suppose it turned savage?'

Mansey agreed about the ape. And two days later when Nell was starting away with him, the ape seemed to sense a separation, for he went beside Nell to the wharf, and when she got into the small boat to start for the anchored schooner it flew into a rage, leaping up and down grotesquely, screeching its anger, and raced along the shore, baffled by the water it would not enter.

Nell ran below to her cabin, but Mansey stayed on deck watching as Evans tried to calm the beast. He saw the ape finally fly towards Forster, who was near the porch and leaped for a gun standing against the house wall. The schooner was too far away for the report of the gun to sound more than a dull 'plup', but the succeeding shots from Evans' heavy revolver, always at his hip, carried clearly. Mansey could not see the end of the tragedy. He was glad that Nell Evans need not know what happened.

Four months later he was startled to find Nell Evans waiting at Port Moresby for his return. She had established

a home in Sydney and was impatient to see her husband and coax him away. Mansey begged her not to go to the island, in vain. She had new and pretty dresses and looked younger, happier, handsomer. He crowded his schooner for speed, and anchored in the island lagoon just after dawn one morning, taking Nell ashore at once.

The boat scarcely touched the sand beach when the great ape swung down through the trees and stood staring at Nell Evans, who called a happy greeting, then said to Mansey,

‘Little Willie’s been hurt. Look at that scar on his head.’

Circling the ape’s skull was a puckered wound, well healed but visible through the reddish-brown hair. But the actions of the animal alarmed Mansey. In a moment Nell Evans was seized in its long arms, held against its great chest, and one paw tried to stroke her fair hair. She screamed with terror, and Mansey leaped forward and was met by a backward swinging paw that fastened on his throat, squeezing until Mansey’s eyes and tongue protruded, then flinging him half conscious against a tree bole, where he lay recovering his breath and watching something worse than the strangling grip of that huge paw on his neck.

The ape was not vicious with Nell Evans. It held her helpless, its face close to hers, its lips moved, and soft yet uncouth sounds frightfully like speech came from deep in its throat in a piteously pleading way as again it tried to stroke her hair. She was too frightened to struggle but at its crooning and coaxing sounds she closed her eyes, half-fainting. Then the ape got queerly on its knees, pressed her hand to its cheek and gazed at her with pathetic agony in its eyes. Nell tried to regain her control of the animal.

‘Good Little Willie. Go and sweep the floor. Go and feed the orchids. Good boy, Willie.’

The ape chattered with desperate intensity, then dejectedly let her go and disappeared among the trees. Mansey ran to her.

‘He frightened me. He never acted that way before. I’ve been away too long. Bill and Dink Forster must be at the surgery and I must see them.’

‘Let me go first. The trip is too long and hot for you,’

he begged, and coaxed her back to the house. He hated to leave her alone there and as the morning sun smote quivering heat about the place and she saw the neglected condition of her once pretty home, she consented to go to the schooner and wait.

Mansey set out through stabbing heat and glare for the surgery, staring in amazement as he went at a stretch of scarlet banding the island below the hill where the ape had doubtless dropped the cuttings and they had grown amazingly, blazoning their red trail like blood from wounds, rooting again and again as they crept far and wide towards the sea. Already trees in their path were dying. He saw a bird try to alight, and petal jaws close over it. He saw butterflies engulfed, and as he stood watching he felt a tug at his boot and saw the yellow backs of petals clapped about his foot. As he jerked it away a snake wriggled within reach of one flower that darted at it and caught the luckless serpent by the middle, its head and tail lashed in the deadly trap. Mansey was already reeling from the lethal emanations of the flowers, and hurried on to where the white building stood, its gate latched.

The ape had scattered red doom that would devour all animal life, smother foliage, denude the island of all living things and leave only sun-baked earth on which lascivious and obscene stems writhed nakedly as pallid serpents among the devouring crests of doom. He was thinking of that when he reached the surgery door and a Chinese met him, then called Forster.

‘You here again, Mansey?’ he said in evident surprise.

‘Mrs. Evans insisted on seeing her husband,’ said Mansey. ‘She is waiting on the schooner.’

‘Nell here . . . Then keep her on the schooner. Bill isn’t able to see any one yet, though he’s recovering nicely.’

Something strengthened Mansey’s feeling of peril.

‘Let me see him anyway,’ he said in a voice of command, and pushed past Forster.

In a shaded room, the sick man lay on a cot, chattering queerly to himself. As the white-robed Chinese attendant came near he grabbed at the hem of his surgical robe and

began pleating it. Mansey's flesh crawled. At sight of him Evans was off the cot, bandy-legged, though he had been a man who walked very erect, jumping up and down grotesquely, peering into Mansey's face, chattering horribly like an ape!

An exclamation broke from Mansey and he stared at Forster who met his gaze with dangerous boldness.

'You knew Evans was a sick man, Mansey. Well, I operated. I arrested his disease awhile. But he isn't the same man he was before, as you can see.'

'Yes, I can see. But I can't believe what I see,' said Mansey, trying to control an impulse to dash from the place, up-anchor and sail far away and never return. For around the head of the man leaping and prancing at his side was the same sort of puckered wound as that on the head of the ape.

Horror tapped at Mansey's brain. He turned from Evans to Forster, and Evans slyly bolted for the door and was gone, with both Chinese after him. Forster followed and Mansey overtook him. He was watching Evans' attempt to catch tree branches and swing himself aloft. He fell, uttering queer ape noises, tripped on vines and brush, but managed to elude his pursuers on the trail to the house, where they found him lying exhausted on the mat in the kitchen where the ape used to sleep!

Mansey reached the house and was in the kitchen when Forster arrived, but Forster quailed before the outraged emotions glaring from the eyes of Tom Mansey.

'I'm glad Mrs. Evans stayed on my ship,' he said. 'You've let all hell loose on this island, but your punishment will be certain. I'm leaving here with Mrs. Evans. I'll tell her Bill is dead.'

'Oh, no, you won't take Nell Evans away,' yelled Forster and the names he called Mansey interested even that port-hardened sea captain. 'You had your chance to horn into this affair. I asked you to take me out the first morning I came here, and you wouldn't. You knew why I didn't want to stay, damn you. You said as much. Said I'd waited six years. And I had. But Bill Evans didn't wait. He brought my girl to the ends of the earth and hid her. He was

afraid of me. He thought he wasn't, and he went under the ether for his operation still persuading himself he wasn't afraid of me. But he knew his body was doomed, anyway. But I've prolonged his span of life. He'll have time to realise the hell I've endured thinking of Nell with him. He'll have a chance to know how I felt, separated from her. Only with Nell and me the separation was geographical. With Nell and Bill it's biological.' Forster's laughter began in a wicked chuckle that gathered noise and evil and rose in a gusty frenzy of demoniac triumphant sound.

'Stop it!' yelled Mansey. 'You're crazy. You're losing your mind here on this island.'

Then he stared as the door opened and out came the body that had been Evans's. A silly grin slit its mouth, its hands carried a tray with bottle and glasses in a slovenly fashion which he rescued from crashing. Then it sat on the porch and plucked at the faded dress belonging to Nell and still hanging there. Mansey gaped as its fingers began to pleat the hem of the dress.

He was so fascinated watching the ape trick of hands that had belonged to a man he liked and respected that he saw nothing as Forster slipped a revolver from his pocket, gripped the nose and swung the butt on Mansey's head. Mansey dropped like a felled ox.

He awakened on a cot in the surgery, bound tightly to the bed from ankles to breast, unable to move hands or feet. Exceedingly bright lights illumined the place, though the windows were dark except for low-burning tropic stars. Forster and the two Chinese moved about, clad in their white surgical gowns, faces masked with gauze, fussing with instruments.

Mansey's head throbbed. He tried to turn it, and found it adhering to the cot by dried blood where the gun-butt had cracked the skin. Forster came and stood beside the cot.

'Awake now, Mansey? That's good. It's ethical to get the patient's consent before operating.'

'Let me out of this. I don't need an operation though you would if I get my hands on you.'

‘Brain injured, beyond a doubt.’ Forster laughed wickedly. His slender fingers were working a hypodermic in a glass of liquid. ‘But the success we made exchanging the brains of Bill Evans and the ape tempts me to go further. As you know, Mansey, it was Evans’ pet theory that surgery would some day make possible the assembling of the best part of several human beings otherwise ready to be junked, and make one workable man. I agree with Bill that it was a noble idea. His body is doomed. I’ve put his brain in the stalwart chassis of the great ape, or, as you sailors call it, Bill’s engine occupies another hull. He’s out there now, swinging through the trees as his ancient forebears did, and we may come back here some day and see an orang-utan operating on little monkeys in this well-equipped little surgery. But in that body of Evans, Little Willie is doomed, and he was a well-trained beast. Now your skull-pan is all right, but you must admit you are only a casual type. The world is full of roaming sailors and you haven’t even a wife waiting for you. No one will mind what happens. And I’ll prove that Little Willie’s brain in your skull will do his tricks and sail a ship as well as you do, so even your company won’t know the difference.’

Mansey strained at his bonds. He cursed the sneering smile of Forster. The solidly built cot creaked with his writhing.

‘Easy now, Mansey, while I give you a shot.’

He came with the hypodermic needle. Mansey turned agonised eyes to the window, and then his struggles subsided. In the outer darkness were stars, and lower down against the glass a face looked in at a cot where a Chinese was fitting an ether cone over the face of what had been Bill Evans. Mansey caught the ether fumes as the other Chinese dripped it into the cone. He heard a roar from the ape’s throat, and Mansey yelled at the top of his lungs,

‘Bill! Bill! Help!’

There was a crash of glass as the ape with a man’s brain swung a cudgel on the window, battering it in and scattering broken glass. The two Chinese left their victim and fled screeching to the door. A yell of terror broke from Forster’s throat as the huge form of an orang-utan broke into the

room, and caught him with one hand around his throat while the other ripped the heavy linen bands holding Mansey to the cot.

Mansey's arms were free. The ape creature tossed him a surgical knife and he was slashing at the remaining bonds hearing the terrible cries of Forster as the orang-utan lifted him to the operating table, bound him fast, then caught up a knife.

Mansey fled, hearing the cries of agonised terror from the surgery as he darted into the darkness. Screech after screech of agony filled his ears, and as he passed the window he saw the ape hand wielding a knife that made a shambles of table and floor and the body of Forster. But Mansey was running as he never ran before, making for the wharf, panting for breath. He fell into the small boat on the beach and somehow pulled it to the schooner just as the first streaks of pearl dawn light flowed over the sea.

On deck he wakened the sleeping native crew and gave orders to lift the anchor, and as the ship slowly swung about and made for the reef jaws, he saw coming down the path the hunched and sorrowful figure of the orang-utan. It came to the wharf and looked after his ship with its body a slumping and hopeless travesty of strength and brute force.

Nell Evans was wakened by the clank of anchor chains and came on deck.

'Bill is dead,' Mansey said in answer to her startled cry. He knew Bill Evans would want her to believe that he died. And when she turned away in sudden grief and went to her cabin to be alone in that first hour of utter bereavement, Mansey saw the ape wave his hand in a human gesture of farewell, then walk to the end of the narrow plank wharf and plunge over and over down to the coral gardens and waiting tridacna jaws that close at a touch and hold their prey. He knew that the soul of Bill Evans had escaped from the ape's body, just as he knew this island of horror would soon be overgrown with sinister orchids, and presently be a sun-baked lifeless rock dreary as craters of the moon.

DENNIS, District Officer of the Labuk district in British North Borneo, had been spending a few days 'local leave' on the Tingling Estate, for Walkely the manager and he were great friends. The night before his departure the two men had sat together in the latter's mosquito room, fitted up like a 'den' and with pipes well lit had roamed in desultory manner over many fields of conversation.

For the last ten minutes or so there had been silence between them—the silence of friends in complete accord. Dennis broke it.

'Throw me a match, Walley,' he said.

Walkely moved as though to comply, then stopped as his 'boy' entered, carrying a tray containing whiskey and soda, which he placed on a table near his master. He was about to depart when Walkely spoke.

'The *Tuan* is leaving before breakfast, Amat. Tell Cookie to make some sandwiches and see the thermos flask is filled with hot tea.'

'*Tuan.*'

'And hand these to the *Tuan.*' Walkely pointed to the matches

Amat obeyed and went out.

Walkely rose from his long chair, mixed the drinks and held out a glass to Dennis.

'To our next meeting,' he said, and raised his glass.

Dennis followed suit. Then, yawning, he rose and stretching his arms well above his head, looked sleepily in the direction of the bedroom.

Walkely nodded assent and held open the mosquito door.

A few minutes later the house was in darkness, save for the lights that shone through the open windows of the two

bedrooms. The rooms were on either side of a large dining room which in turn opened out from the main veranda, off one side of which was built the mosquito room. At the far end of the dining room were the two folding doors that led to a passage and a pantry and thence down some steps to the kitchen and 'boys' quarters at the rear of the house.

As Dennis undressed he sleepily hummed the latest fox-trot record received from England. Then, dimming the light, he got into bed.

From where he lay, he could hear Walkely moving about his room, and could see the reflection his light cast on the exposed *attap* roof of the house. As he idly watched, speculating dreamily on Walkely's success as a manager, Walkely's lamp in turn was lowered. Followed the creaking noise of a body turning on a spring mattress—then silence.

Dennis rolled from his left to his right side preparatory to sleep.

'Nighty-night, old thing,' he grunted.

'Night,' came back the sleepy reply.

Then all was quiet save for the gentle rustling of the rubber trees and the occasional hoot of an owl.

Presently Dennis woke to full alertness. He was not strung up; no sound or fear nor nightmare had awakened him. He was simply and quietly awake. Turning on his side he looked at his watch. The hands pointed to two a.m. He closed his eyes but sleep would not be wooed.

For a long time Dennis lay in the nearly darkened room, watching the waving branch of a rubber tree outside the window, that moved gently to the sighing of the breeze.

Suddenly he heard the sound of feet ascending the steps that led from garden to veranda doors. But half awake, he listened.

Slowly the footsteps mounted the stairs; then came the lifting of the latch that fastened the low wooden gates, and the creaking of moving hinges. The footsteps entered, continued the whole length of the veranda, to pass into the dining-room beyond. Here for a moment they halted. Then they moved again, shuffling uncertainly—forward, backward,

sideways—as those of a person trying to locate something in the dark . .

Again they moved with steady tread and reached the intervening doors that shut off the passage.

Dennis listened and waited. What the devil was old Walley doing, he sleepily wondered. A sudden rush of cool air struck on him over the top of the bedroom wall billowing out his mosquito net.

Creak—creak—creak—the doors were opening. The footsteps went along the passage and came to a standstill at the end.

‘Boy!’ The call was clear and decisive but Dennis failed quite to recognise the voice although he realised it was a European’s.

There came no answer.

‘Boy!’ This time the call was sharper, and impatience was in its tone.

Still no reply.

In the silence Dennis, wondering greatly, waited, for he was still uncertain whether the voice was Walkely’s or another’s. The footsteps sounded again as they descended the stairs that led to the servants’ quarters. On the bottom step they halted.

‘Boy!’ The call was long, loud and angry. Yet still no answer came.

Up the stairs the footsteps returned. They strode along the passage, paused as the doors were closed and the latch clicked, then swiftly moved through the dining-room out on to the wide veranda. Here for a moment they rested.

Sounded the fumbling for a latch, the squeak of a faulty hinge, and from the sharp banging of a door Dennis knew the footsteps had entered the mosquito room.

He sprang out of bed and, sitting on its edge, hurriedly pushed his feet into slippers. Then, as he was about to move, the lamp in the room went out.

‘Damn!’ he muttered, and fumbled for his matches, but before he found them he was listening to the opening and shutting of drawers. He struck a match and by its light crossed to the lamp, the wick of which, however, refused

to burn, though he wasted many matches upon it. In the gathering darkness, for the moon was setting, he moved towards the door, but with his hand upon the knob stood still, for the footsteps were shuffling again and the sharp banging of the mosquito door made him jump.

Through the veranda the footsteps went, gaining sureness with every stride. The gates creaked and the latch fell to. Down the steps the footsteps clumped, the sound growing fainter till it became lost in the night. Three deep-toned notes from the office gong boomed on the air. Dennis shivered, kicked off his slippers and returned to bed. The air was cold, so he drew his blanket well about him.

'Old Walley's walking in his sleep or else indulging in a midnight prowl,' he muttered. Half a minute later, he was sound asleep.

As Dennis' eyes opened to the beauty of a tropic dawn, the clink of silver spoons against china reached his ears and the scent of a cigarette crept into the room. He plunged his head into a basin of cold water, brushed his hair and still in his *sarong* and *kabaiah* (sleeping garments) went out on to the veranda where Walkely paused in the act of conveying a cup to his lips.

'Morning, Dennis,' he grunted, and continued drinking his tea.

He was never very talkative the first thing in the morning.

Dennis answered and busied himself with the teapot. Then, under cover of meticulously choosing a piece of toast, he studied Walkely, who showed no signs of having spent a sleepless night.

Suddenly Walkely looked up and caught Dennis' eye upon him.

'Well,' he asked, 'what is it?'

'Nothing,' Dennis replied curtly.

'Then why look at me like that?'

'Sorry, old thing,' Dennis stammered. 'I was only wondering—'

'Yes?'

'What the devil you were up to last night—walking all over the house and shouting for your boy.'

'Then you heard it too?' Walkely asked the question with relief.

'It? What's *it*?' Dennis retorted. 'Didn't I hear you come up the veranda steps, open the gates and walk to the back? You called "Boy" three times, but got no answer. Then you walked back through the house and down the steps. What was wrong, Walley?'

Walkely looked Dennis full in the eyes as he slowly answered. 'Nothing! Nothing was wrong and I never moved from my room till this morning.'

'But—then—who the—'

'I never moved,' Walkely repeated. 'What you heard was Glister.'

'Glister? What on earth do you mean? Who's Glister?'

'You know. The chap who was manager here before Bellamy. He shot himself. Died in your room—on your bed. He's buried in the garden at the foot of the hill below your window. Great pity but—drink and a native woman—nice chap too.'

Walkely ceased as the light of recollection shone on Dennis's face.

'Yes, I remember,' he spoke almost to himself. 'I met him once at a Jesselton Race Meeting. A tall, good-looking fellow.'

Walkely nodded, and Dennis continued. 'He was awfully keen on a beautiful native woman—a Dusun named Jebee.'

'Yes. She was lured away from Glister by another man. It was a dirty thing to do—'

'The swine. I only hope—'

'You needn't worry,' Walkely interrupted. 'He rues the day all right, I'll bet, for she's got him body and soul—doped to the eyes—and her temper is that of a fiend incarnate. She is priestess, too, of the *Gusi* and he daren't call his soul his own.'

'So poor old Glister's loss was really his gain, if he'd only known,' Dennis' words were gently spoken.

'Yes. But he felt her absence and in the loneliness that followed, the drink got him again.'

For nearly a minute there was silence between the two.

It was as if their memories had recalled Glister's spirit to his old home, almost as if he were sitting at the table with them, while the tinkling of Jebee's anklets sounded from an adjoining room . . .

Dennis broke the silence. 'And you mean that—that was he, last night?' he asked.

'Yes.' The word seemed drawn reluctantly from Walkely's lips.

'But good Lord, man—you don't mean—you can't—it's preposterous!'

'I know.' Walkely spoke slowly. 'It sounds absurd, doesn't it? But old Bellamy went through it, saw him and spoke to him, and once even shot at him.'

'Bellamy! Bellamy shot him!'

'Yes. And there isn't much mysticism about him—he's as much imagination as a turnip.'

'But—'

'All the buts in the world won't alter matters. Bellamy's seen him. I've seen him and you've heard him. He's there—and it happens, and it's always the same—only—'

'What?' The word was wrung from Dennis.

'He's never entered the mosquito room before.'

'You think—'

'I don't know! How can I? I'm only wondering why he went there—what he was searching for.'

'Drink, perhaps?'

Walkely shook his head. 'No,' he said, 'the room wasn't built in his days. No: there's something worrying him, something that's caused this variation of his usual walk.'

His eyes met Dennis's and he gave a short, half-ashamed laugh. Then, 'Get on with your tea. When you've finished we'll go and look at his grave. I always inspect it twice a month and put a coolie on cleaning it up and looking after the flowers. We'll have a look today.'

As Dennis dressed with unusual slowness, his mind was full of the tragedy so strangely recalled. 'Poor old Glister!' he muttered. 'What an end!'

An impatient call roused Dennis from his reverie and he

hastened to the veranda to find Walkely already on the garden steps conversing with Gaga, the head overseer of many years' standing.

The three at once set off. Down well-laid cement steps, along a broad path that wound among a profusion of bright coloured flowers. Overhead a flaming sun rode in an azure sky, and a faint breeze fanned their faces with its cooling breath, perfumed with the scent of dew and the fragrant elusive blossoms of the rubber trees.

At the foot of the hill they turned and went in single file along a narrow path that followed the winding contour of the hill. The three walked in silence for speech was difficult along that narrow track. Suddenly the path, dipping down, turned sharply, and Walkely, who was leading, became for an instant lost to view. Dennis, humming a Dusun love song, followed close behind, but as he reached the turn the tune died abruptly on his lips and he stood stone-still.

'Good Lord ! What can it mean ?'

The words were gasped by Walkely who stood transfixed, staring with horror-struck eyes straight before him.

Instinctively Walkely turned to Dennis, who, like himself, stood with gaze fixed and staring eyes.

'What can it mean?' he gasped a second time.

For they had reached the grave, *and it was open*. Heaped under the railings which surrounded it and which were intact were piles of fresh-dug earth and all around lay the scattered flowers, withered and trampled into twisted shapes.

The eyes of Dennis and Walkely met. In each there lurked a question which neither dared to ask. Each heard again the shuffling footsteps of the previous night, and the opening and shutting of drawers in the mosquito room.

A shadow fell across them as they stood. There came a startled cry, the quick pattering of bare feet, and Gaga flung himself upon his knees, burying his hands in the earth.

'Gaga !'

The word was a sharp command of outraged wrath. But the man did not heed, and his hands continued fumbling, searching, fingering.

Walkely stooped down to seize the kneeling *mandor* by

the shoulder, then straightened up as the latter rose and, turning, showed a face pallid under the yellow of his skin from which stark horror shone.

‘The *pandang* (buckle). *Tuan*, it is gone,’ he gasped. ‘It has gone!’

Walkely looked at him in stupefaction.

‘Gaga!’ he began, but got no further, for the man, heedless of the upraised hand, broke in:

‘The *pandang*, *Tuan*, the silver *pandang* that Jebee used to wear as token of her priesthood of the *Gusi* is gone. The silver *pandang* is no more!’

He ceased and for a moment there was silence among the three.

On Walkely’s face there showed a blank amazement, but Dennis’ brows had gathered in a frown and his lips had closed in a deep, straight line. He was the first to speak.

‘Walkely, may I ask Gaga questions?’ he said.

Walkely nodded assent, and Dennis turned to Gaga.

‘Gaga, tell me, what makes you say the silver *pandang* is no more?’

‘Because,’ Gaga stammered in his emotion, ‘because when *Tuan* Glister was buried, the *pandang* was buried too—and—now—’

His gaze sought for the coffin for a moment and he fingered a charm of monkey’s teeth that hung around his neck.

‘Tell me, Gaga.’ Dennis’ voice was very gentle. ‘All you know. Begin at the beginning.’

Gaga looked relieved, for a native resents questioning and loves to tell a story in his own way.

‘The *Tuans* know,’ he began, ‘that *Tuan* Glister’ had a *nyai* (a native housekeeper) named Jebee. She came to him when she was very young, but vowed by the oaths of her parents to the priesthood of the *Gusi*, the sacred jars we *Dusuns* worship, which only our womenkind may tend. But she was young and beautiful and full of life. Her beauty was unmatched in all this land of Sabah (Borneo); her form was lithe, her footsteps light, her waist was small; yet she was vowed in wifehood to a jar, the sacred *Gusi*! Her lips

and eyes, though warring with her blood, were innocent of love till *Tuan* Glister visited the village in search of coolies for the Estate.

‘Then—’ Gaga paused, seeming for a moment at a loss to find his words, ‘then—the *Tuan* was tall and handsome, and possessed golden hair. He had a laughing, winning way and eyes that darted here and there and made the warm blood race within your veins when once his glance had rested on you. His eyes discovered Jebbee, and—’

Gaga looked nervously from Dennis to Walkely as he shuffled his feet, frightened of saying too much about a white man in front of others of his race.

Dennis read the meaning of the glance.

‘Yes, Gaga. You may speak,’ he said, ‘for the *Tuan Besar* (manager) and I are friends and we would give *Tuan* Glister’s wandering spirit peace. Say all that is in your heart. We understand.’

‘*Tuan!*’ Gaga’s tone conveyed a depth of grateful meaning. ‘That night there was dancing and feasting in the village, and pitcher after pitcher of *tapai* (fermented liquor) was consumed. The *Tuan* drank too, but none could stand against him, and one by one they sank into a heavy sleep. Only the *Tuan* remained. He left the headman’s house and going through the village reached Jebbee’s home.

‘It was that darkest hour before dawn when the chill wind blows, yet she was seated on the topmost step. The light of the dying moon seemed centred on the silver buckle that she wore hung from a rotan girdle round her waist.

‘Their eyes met. No word was said. The *Tuan* stretched out his arms and Jebbee went to him and the *Tuan*’s arms enfolded her.’

Gaga ceased. The silence lengthened till the office gong, booming eight deep notes, shattered the spell.

‘How do you know all this, Gaga?’ Walkely asked at length. ‘You never mentioned it before.’

A look of surprise flitted over the *mandor*’s face, then he quietly replied, ‘The *Tuan* never asked me my story before, nor is it customary for the white man to discuss others of his race with natives. How do I know? Why, *Tuan*

Besar, was I not present on that night, and is not Jebee my sister, though of a different mother?

'The *Tuan* had saved my life, and Jebee was young. The warm blood danced in her veins and her heart cried out for a mate. And so—The river, *Tuan*, flowed far out from the village. The *Tuan's* boat was there. All in the village slept. Then the *Tuan* led her to the boat, while I stole up the steps, entered the house and made a bundle of her clothes. Then to the waiting boat I followed. The *Tuan* had covered Jebee with his coat and she was sleeping, but the silver buckle hung round his neck. And from that day it never left him. We three were alone in the boat. The *Tuan* and I picked up the paddles, and as their blades in silence touched the water the moon slipped beneath the earth and the *Burong hanta* (screech owl) hooted thrice. An evil omen, which the *Tuan* heeded not, and Jebee did not hear.

'Till the sun was high we paddled and by noon were far beyond pursuit, for the river flowed very swiftly and one does not wake early from such a sleep as those in the village were sleeping.'

Gaga paused, then he added, 'The rest of the story the *Tuans* know. For a little while *Tuan* Glister and Jebee were happy. But the omen of the *Burong hanta* and the dying moon would not be denied.

'And the shadow of the *Gusi* lay between them. So though the *Tuan* loved her, he drank too deeply, and she found favour in another's sight and went away. But the *Tuans* know the rest. I buried him—there was no white man on the Estate—and as he died, he made me promise to bury the buckle with him, hanging round his neck. It was the only thing of Jebee's that he kept.'

'And now?'

Dennis put the question sharply and held Gaga's gaze.

'I am afraid, *Tuan*—sore afraid.'

'Of what?'

'I do not know; and the silver *pandang* has been stolen though its hiding place was unknown. To none has it value, save my people, and for years now they have let it rest. But, *Tuan*, they never forget, and the *Gusi* is most sacred.

In the great blue jar that Jebbee used to tend and should have wedded, Maboga the bad spirit dwells. Of late evil has befallen my people; the buffaloes bring forth no young, and the crops refuse to ripen; so, *Tuan*, I am afraid.'

Gaga ceased and once again a silence fell upon the three.

Suddenly it was broken by the hurrying footsteps and laboured breathing of a man who ran, and round the bend appeared an *opas*.

All three looked up at his approach and saw stark terror on his face.

'*Tuan! Tuan!*' he gasped. '*Tuan* Glister cannot be found. His house is empty and his bedroom disarranged, and on the floor is a pool of blood—'

His eyes caught sight of the open grave. The words faltered on his tongue then ceased, and he stood silent, trembling like a leaf.

At the mention of the name Dennis started, but before he could speak Walkely answered the question hovering on his lips.

'Young Glister's my new assistant, Dennis,' he spoke in a queer strained voice. 'He came only last month. You haven't met him yet.'

'But—'

'He's a younger brother of—' Walkely looked towards the grave. 'It's horrible!' he muttered.

In a flash the meaning of the rifled grave and Glister's disappearance grew plain and the frown on Dennis' face grew deeper and his lips more compressed. Heedless of Walkely's questioning of the gibbering *opas* he turned to Gaga.

'Gaga,' he said, 'I see the hand of Maboga stretching out, seeking revenge for the insult of years ago. His arm is long. It stretched from the *Tuan's* grave to a village in the hills. Is it not so?'

'*Tuan!*' Gaga answered.

'It stretches,' Dennis continued, 'from the village to the new *Tuan's* house as well, for what the white man took must be repaid with interest. What think you, Gaga?'

'That the *Tuan* is wise and reads the Dusun like a book.'

'Dennis!' Walkely had dismissed the *opas* and putting out his hand grasped Dennis' arm. 'Dennis,' he cried. 'What do you mean?' His voice rose. 'Glistar has disappeared, there's blood on his floor and we stand here while heaven knows what devil's work is being done! What do you mean—with interest.'

'Listen, Walley.' Dennis weighed his words and spoke with slow conviction. 'I'm in the dark almost as much as you—but I know the Dusuns and the fetish of their *Gusi* worship. When Glistar took Jebbe from her people she broke her vows and outraged the sacred jars; but while the years were plentiful and their calves were strong they did not worry; when, as now, the inevitable lean year comes they seek a reason for their troubles.'

'You mean—?' Asked Walkely, still perplexed.

'That reason is Maboga. They think he will not be appeased unless—'

Dennis did not finish, but his glance wandered to the open grave and back to Walkely's strained white face, on which the dawning light of comprehension showed.

'Good heavens!' he muttered. 'You really think—?'

Dennis nodded. Then he turned to Gaga.

'Gaga,' he said, 'tell me exactly what happens at the Feast.'

'The silver buckles of the priestesses, *Tuan*, are hung upon the *Gusis'* lips. Then when the dying moon is half-way set, the mateless wives say prayers and wash the sacred jars, and call upon the spirits to come forth and give their judgment on the village for the year. This year I think Maboga's jar will once again be decked. But who will cleanse the sacred lips? I cannot think, for while Jebbe lives, the *pandang* may be worn by no one else. Tuan Glistar dared, and paid the price.'

'And Maboga?' Dennis' voice was low, almost a whisper.

For a moment Gaga hesitated, then he said, 'The *Tuan* himself has said, "What the white man took must be repaid—with interest."'

He paused; then he added, 'A white man's head has never yet hung in a Dusun house, but three days hence Maboga will decide.'

The eyes of Dennis and Walkely met. Both seemed again to hear the shufflings in the night, the opening and the shutting of drawers. Both understood the object of that search.

'I'll borrow Glister's revolver, Walley, for we'll go along with only Gaga as our guide and attend this Feast,' said Dennis.

For hours the booming of gongs had been borne upon the breeze, yet though the three had been steadily ascending, the deep-toned notes still sounded far away. On the crest of a hill Dennis and his companions halted for a brief rest, and then onward and upward the trio climbed while the track grew narrower and stonier and the jungle pressed closer on every side, and long trailing thorn-edged creepers, hanging from the trees, whipped their faces and tore their clothes.

The leading beast stopped and Gaga raised his hand. Without a word the two white men drew level, for the path had widened out and they stood upon the border of a glade, dissected by a muddy stream, whose banks were scored with a myriad hoof-marks.

Gaga slipped from his animal and softly spoke.

'We are nearly there, *Tuan*. This is their grazing ground, but all the animals are at the village for all have ridden to the Feast.'

Dennis nodded and proceeded, with the others, to tether his beast.

Then on foot the three moved forward, but with a quicker pace, for the gongs were loudly booming with a beat that would not be denied. Even as they crossed the muddy stream, the swaying, rhythmic time rising and falling with the cadence of a dance, gave place to an insistent note that rose and rose, till only one intense vibration, one single throbbing note beat on the heavy air with a malignant strength, sapping all kindly thoughts and fanning to flame the primal lusts of hate and vengeance.

A little further, and the path rose with a sudden precipitousness that forced them to mount the well-worn stones as

though they climbed a stair. They reached the top, to stand upon a tiny plain, on which the shadows of the circling trees were slowly lengthening.

Even as they rested to regain their breath that one insistent note ceased, and for an instant silence reigned.

Then from the glade's farther end arose a cry, faint at first, then slowly louder, harsher, stronger, swelling to a mighty paean, to a tumultuous cry: 'Maboga! Maboga! *Aki* (Father) Maboga!' And stillness once again, save for the hurried padding of running feet as the three raced across the shadow-flecked glade.

Panting, they reached a wall of jungle, pierced by a sunken path that twined its short length through the heart of a moss-clad hill, whose riven sides were lit, with weird fantastic lights, thrown from countless torches that burned upon a plateau at its end.

In the shadow of a belt of trees they paused to take stock of their surroundings.

The plateau formed a horseshoe, and at its apex stood a native house built eight feet off the ground, whose length stretched three hundred feet. At either end, leading to the only doors, were rough-hewn steps, carved from solid logs of timber, and from these steps arose two poles, six feet in height, between which was stretched a length of knotted rotan. From this, like a gruesome necklace, hung two rows of ghastly human heads—blackened and dried from the smoke of years—save at each end. And there hung two heads with staring sightless eyes and bared lips exposing whitened teeth, and from them red blood dripped.

Upon the ground, placed in a semi-circle, stood the jars—the sacred *Gusi*—ranged in accordance with their height and rank. From either end they tapered up towards the central spot, where side by side rose two of flaming blue, that reached the height of a man's shoulder.

The rim or lip of each was of a different hue—one black, one white—while from the neck of those whose lip was black grew four large ears, and in the lobes of each was placed a human skull.

Behind each jar, save one, a woman stood; her thick

black hair piled high upon her head, framing her lime-washed face from which her dark eyes shone; her figure, swathed from chin to toe in shrouded black, was girt at the waist with a girdle of mice and monkey's teeth.

A silver *pandang* hung under the lip of every jar but one, and resting on its swelling shoulder shimmered and winked in the torches' fantastic light.

Facing the jars, the Dusuns sat in rows, immobile and intent. There shone upon the face of every one a strained expectancy, showing in the taut muscles of the back and the restless twining fingers of the hands. Thus they waited—in that strange uncanny silence—for the answer to their cry 'Maboga, Maboga, *Aki* Maboga!'

Almost forgetful of the purpose of their errand, Dennis and Walkely watched, fascinated by the scene before them, lit by the waning moon and the lurid flickering torches. Something of its primaeval instincts and the tension of the squatting natives crept into their veins and held them spell-bound as they gazed upon the coloured jars, with their glittering, shining buckles, each with its dumb attendant white-faced woman, backed by the long unbroken shadow of the palmroofed house.

While the moon sank slowly in the west, until its lower rim began to touch the topmost ridge of the roof, the silence lengthened, till it seemed as if nature slept and those rows of squatting natives were graven images devoid of breath.

But all at once there came a creaking sound and the tension snapped. A long rippling murmur, half sigh, half gasp, filled the air, and Gaga's hand gripped Dennis' arm.

'Look, *Tuan*, look!' he whispered, and pointed to a hut which stood alone and almost hidden in the shade of a mighty billian tree.

The two men followed the line of Gaga's pointing finger.

The hut door opened slowly as the noise increased. But though no light burned within, a shadowy form was faintly visible moving towards the glade. Slowly, silently, though still half hidden by the shade, the form drew nearer. Then as all eyes were turned upon it a glinting speck of light

winked in the gloom. And as the figure moved the winking light moved too.

Slowly, steadily from the shade into the flickering fringe of torches; from the fringe into the full lurid glare moved the figure and the light.

A quick intake of many breaths; a long loud gasp of terrified surprise. Then silence—and a woman, with a silver buckle hanging from a girdle round her waist, stood before the great blue sacred jar, from under whose deep black lip no silver buckle hung.

Over the silence that like a living spirit lay upon the glade, Gaga's excited whisper just reached Dennis' and Walkely's ears.

'*Tuan*, it is Jebee, and she wears the silver *pandang* that I buried in *Tuan* Glister's grave! *Tuan, Tuan*, I am afraid!'

Even as he spoke, the woman raised her rounded arms, on which no gleaming bangles shone, and with a single gesture unloosed the coils of her high-wound hair. The long thick tresses fell about her like a black cloak.

Again she raised her arms, this time in supplication, and her low, clear voice went chanting through the glade.

'*Aki* Maboga, of the sacred *Gusi*, Spirit of Evil who dwelleth in the great blue jar, hear now thy erring daughter, thy forsworn priestess and forgive. Here in my shame I stand before thee and the assembled people, bearing the silver *pandang*, symbol of thy might and power, which in my youth and wilful love I disgraced.

'Thou, who for long hast been neglected, till thy just wrath burst into flame, so that the crops no longer ripen and the herds cease to bring forth young, lift, I beseech thee, *Aki* Maboga, the shadow of thy anger from off my race.

'Through me and for my sin my people have been punished; through me, or *Aki*, pronounce the penance thou dost claim!'

She ceased, and as a wailing cry rose from the assembled natives, she slipped slowly to her knees, and flinging her arms round the great jar's neck, rested her lips upon its blackened rim.

Walkely stirred, but Dennis' warning hand bade him keep still. Gaga, speechless and with bulging eyes, stared at the kneeling figure.

A wind was stirring in the trees. The moon had sunk completely out of sight, and here and there a flickering torch gutted and burnt out.

Thus in the creeping darkness they waited, while the moment grew to minutes burdened with suspense—waited for Maboga's answer that his deep black lips would whisper in Jebee's ear.

At length with infinite grace she rose and stood clothed in her long black hair behind the great blue jar; for on its swelling shoulders, glinting against the deep black lip, the silver *pandang* lay.

The wind was sighing in the trees. The rustling leaves made soft accompaniment to her voice, which trembled with emotion.

'My lips have kissed the sacred *Gusi*—my tears have washed its deep black lip. The silver *pandang* has returned to deck the shrine of the Great Spirit who has spoken, for my ears have caught his whispering breath.'

A murmur rose, then faded, and she continued. 'Rejoice, oh, people, for I see the crops on all the hillsides ripening and the herds with their young. But for his clemency, Maboga asks a price.'

She paused, then, stretching out her arms, cried in a ringing voice, 'What will you give, my people, to allay your desperate plight?'

Quick as the summer lightning, swift as the adder's tongue came the answer from those rows of waiting natives.

'What the white man took, let him repay with interest. The head of the white man's brother we will give as a make-peace to Maboga and as thy wedding gift.'

She raised her hand and there was silence.

'Thy words are good; thy offering acceptable unto—'

Her words were drowned in a great shout of fear, as a lighted torch fell from its bamboo socket on to the palm-roofed house.

Like running water, fanned by the rising breeze, the flames

spread rapidly, till in the twinkling of an eye the wooden house was nothing but three hundred feet of sheeted flame.

Then pandemonium reigned and terror stalked the glade.

But to the watching three the fire was providential, for the burning house lit up the hut, till now hidden in the gloom, and at the single window they beheld young Glister's blood-stained face.

Under the shadow of the trees, skirting the edge of the tiny plain, they raced. A few more yards and they would reach the door—another second—out of the shadows by the hut a naked figure sprang—her long black hair streaming in the breeze, a glittering sharp-edged sword in her hand.

With an oath, Walkely forged ahead, but missing his footing on a twisted root, stumbled and fell.

The sudden, instinctive tightening of his fingers, a flare and a sharp report; a cry of pain, a sagging drooping figure—and Jebbe lay a crumpled heap across the threshold of the hut.

LORD OF THE TALKING HEADS

ARTHUR WOODWARD

THE 'phone rang and the secretary announced that a man was coming up to see me. Such reports are part of the day's business. Often they are worth while. Sometimes they are the means of acquiring valuable collections or specimens for the museum. At other times they are merely indicative of some one who wishes something identified or requires information on some Indian tribe. All are welcome.

The man who rapped timidly on the door and sidled furtively into the room with a small paper-wrapped parcel in his hand looked at least sixty. His hair was white and his face thin, haggard but singularly free from wrinkles for a man of his age.

'Are you the man in charge of this department?' he asked. Again I was puzzled for the voice was that of a man in his prime.

'Yes, sir. Won't you be seated?' I responded, motioning to a guest chair near the desk.

'Are you the one accepts things for the museum, Indian things and such-like?'

Again I nodded. 'Always glad to look at anything. You have something interesting?'

He placed the small parcel on the desk.

'I—I think I have,' he faltered. 'Mebbe you won't think so, but if you'd care to listen a minute—that is if you have the time, it won't take very long—I'd like to tell you about this—this specimen I want to loan you, if you want it.'

Something about the man, his old-youthful look and actions, the air of timidity with which he entered the room, aroused in me a curiosity that I do not usually have for the chance visitor.

'Make yourself at home,' I said. 'Comfortable? All right, shoot!'

He drew a long breath and eyed me steadily. 'I don't look crazy, do I?' he asked quietly.

I laughed at that. He looked the part of a timid, hard-working rancher, but scarcely that of an insane man.

'Well,' he continued, settling back in his chair, 'I just wanted to know, because what I have to tell you may sound crazy, but I want to say right now that I am as sane as you are, only it's all so damned weird and foolish that sometimes I wonder if I am crazy or not. Do you know who I am?'

'You have the best of me, friend,' I answered. 'I don't recall having seen you before.'

'Well, I work here in the museum,' he said. 'My name is John Benson.'

I thought rapidly, trying to fit this man with some of the attendants who might possibly work in the annex or the preparator's laboratory, places I rarely visited, but could not remember having seen him or hearing his name.

'I'm the night watchman,' he added. 'I know you by your name on the door. I make the rounds every night, but you've never seen me. I've been planning on coming to see you for a month, ever since I got the job, and couldn't bring myself to do it. But things have come to such a pass I just had to get rid of it.'

'Get rid of what?' I asked.

He pointed to the bundle on the desk. 'That. No, wait, don't open it yet. Wait till I tell you my little yarn; then you can look at it and if you want it for the museum, I'll loan it to you. I can't give it to you, but you can have it for a long time loan.'

'We have papers for what we call indefinite loans,' I said.

'That's it. I'll loan it to you indefinitely; you can keep it as long as I live. Keep it in a glass case where I can see it at night when I make my rounds, and I won't have to think of it being in my room upstairs daytimes while I'm asleep. That's why I want you to have it. I must retain ownership while I'm alive. After I'm dead—well, you can do what you

wish with it—keep it, burn it, bury it, anything you like. Now you want the story? ’

He was a most unusual man and his statements were as unusual as his looks and manners, and his words aroused my curiosity as nothing had done for many a moon.

‘ Well,’ he began, ‘ two years ago I shipped out of San Francisco for a job with a mining company in Ecuador. I was just twenty-eight then, I am sixty now! Look at my hair! Look at my face! You thought I was an old man, didn’t you? No matter, every one does. That’s why I can’t get a job as a young man. My looks are against me. That’s why I am a night watchman, working at an old man’s job for an old man’s pay, by night, and trying to sleep by day. My God! If I don’t get some sleep soon I’ll be as mad as I sound.

‘ Well, no matter. Once this is off my chest, I’ll sleep soundly.

‘ The job didn’t plan out as well as I’d expected, and being young and ready for anything, I fell like a ripe peach for an old yarn of a lost Inca city lousy with gold somewhere in the Oriente country. I heard it from a young Indian in Quito. He seemed to know what he was talking about. Got me all pepped up with the idea, and offered to guide me in. Said he needed a white man to help him.

‘ We outfitted and started out. I didn’t know a thing about the country, or what we needed, left it all to the Indian. I furnished him with all the money I had, and it seemed to me he got an ungodly amount of stuff for just two of us, and when I mentioned it he just grinned and said he knew what we were up against, and would need everything we had before we got back—if we got back. That last crack didn’t sound good to me, and I asked him what he meant.

‘ Then he told me about the Jibaros. To me they might have been a new brand of cigarettes or something to eat had I heard them mentioned in ’Frisco but when that brown-skinned devil calmly informed me that they were some of his uncivilised brothers who made it a national pastime to remove people’s heads and convert them into household ornaments, cold shivers rippled up my backbone and I began

to wish I was anywhere but there. However, there was no backing out then. The Indian had hired some carriers from another tribe to cart our stuff over the mountains and down into the forest land. The whole push decamped the second night after we reached the timber.

“Now what?” I asks. “How are we going to get all this junk into this mess with us, and where is that city of gold?” By this time I was beginning to be fed up with cold nights and hot days, strong winds and poor grub.

“We wait, bimeby they come, take us in. Pretty soon everything all *bueno*.”

That night they did come, twenty or thirty of them, lean half-naked cusses, all carrying long chonta palm spears tipped with bone points and decorated with plaited basketry and tufts of bright feathers. Nearly every one had a German-made machete thrust through a woven girdle, and five or six of them carried .44 Winchesters.

They jabbered among themselves, looked at me, grinned, fingered my hair—it was red then—and every minute I expected to see one of their big knives flicker towards my neck or have a spear probing my liver. I didn’t like it and told Pepe, my Indian guide, so in danged few words. I was all for going back. He wouldn’t hear of it.

“We go with them now, see the chief, he expects us,” he said.

And go we did. At sunset we halted in a clearing where a big house stood, made of posts set on end in the ground and thatched with grass of some sort.

They motioned us to go in, and once inside I took a good look round and nearly fell over, for there, sitting on a common kitchen chair, sat a huge negro. He was a good six feet tall and husky as a mule. On his head he had a short stiff stand-up headdress of purple and red parrot feathers. On his chest was a breastplate of jaguar skin ornamented all over with red and black seeds, bright feathers, stuffed humming bird skins and shining green beetle wings.

On his arms were bands of bark painted red and hung with crimson feather tufts. In his ears were huge golden wheels inlaid with turquoise, the first evidence I had seen of any

gold in that neck of the woods. A Winchester lay across his lap. When he saw me he grinned like a devil.

“Git down on yoh knees, white trash,” he rumbled. “Git down on yoh knees and crawl heah and kiss ma feet. Down, yoh heah me?”

‘He raised the Winchester and at the same time I felt the point of a spear prod me in the small of the back. Instinctively I glanced over my shoulder and saw Pepe leer-
ing at me mockingly.

‘What was there to do? A bloodthirsty traitorous Indian behind me, a mad coon in front of me, ready to blow my guts out. I did what you’d have done, brother; I crawled.

‘Well, that was the beginning of six months’ hell. It seemed the Big Smoke had deserted from a steamer on the coast and had made his way inland, and was just a bit mad, by his actions. He had set himself up as a sort of god among those Jibaros. He had welded them into a fighting body and ruled them by magic. He claimed he had conjuring powers, and those babies are as superstitious as they make ’em. He had learned of a hidden Inca treasure and helped himself to it. He hated white men, and had lured several parties into the forest, where he delivered them into the hands of the Jibaro warriors. The heads of those unfortunates hung in a dark repulsive cluster round the centre pole of the Big Smoke’s house.

‘Then he got the Big Idea. He wanted a white slave. He sent Pepe, one of his trusted men, out with the same bait—buried gold. I was the fall guy.

‘For six months I was dog-robber to that big burly black man. I had to fan him, I had to wash his feet, I had to fetch and carry for him, and all the time I schemed to escape.

‘He was a cunning devil. He seemed to be able to read my thoughts. When I looked longingly at the trail that led into the forest lands towards the west, he’d laugh and prod me in the ribs.

“Thinkin’ of leavin’ me, wuz yoh? Jus’ try it, white trash! Yuh haid will look purty fine up dar among dose fine gemmemun. Yassuh, soon’s yoh daid I’m gonna sew yoh

soul inside yoh haid and keep yoh to help me lak I does dem other white folks. Yassuh, dyin' won't let yoh go. I keeps yoh atter you-all am daid. Oooee, I got power. I's got conjure medicine. I holds on to daid men's souls. Look, white trash, see, dey all got dey lips sewn up. Dey can't escape. Dey helps me."

'He was mad. No doubt about it. But didn't those Jibaros eat it up! They believed implicitly in what he said, and every head they took they shrank to the size of an orange, using hot sand and rocks in the curing process. Then they held a nine-day ceremony, during which time the head-takers danced with those damned grisly things flopping on their chests. At first they just stuck little chonta palm splinters in the lips, and later ran long cotton strands through the holes, sewing the lips tightly together.

'I attended many of those ceremonies during the time I was with them. I had to. In that way I learnt just how to do it—how long the fresh skin should be boiled in the preliminary shrinking, and how to mould the features as the skin gradually dried, how to sew the cut at the back of the neck where they slit the skin in order to peel the hide from the head, and how to do the delicate skinning work required to remove the skin from around the nose and eyes.

'One day they brought in the head of a kid about fourteen or fifteen, a *mestizo*, a half-breed.

"Now white trash, I show yoh how I keeps de soul", leered the Big Smoke when the head was properly cured. "I done got this young-un's spirit cooped up, an' to show yoh how easy it is, I'se gonna take de splinters outen de lips an' leave 'em out so's yoh can heah it talk to me. Hit's too young to bodder me. Hit's too scairt o' me to do anythin' but obey. Watch and lissen! "

'I'll never forget that night as long as I live. Big Smoke took that gruesome wizened head and swung it by the head-cord, which was fastened to the top of the scalp, on the centre pole. Then he sat down on his chair facing it, and closed his eyes. The hut was full of Jibaros, stinking of sweat and grease; the fire had some cussed stuff on it that

gave off a sickish smell, and a grey silvery smoke that made the air foggy.

“Lissen, yoh spirit boy, lissen an answer me. I’s tellin’ yoh what I wants yoh to do. Tell me, what does it look lak, dat house way up yander on the mountains, de last one just before de trail dips down de hills into de trees? Tell me so’s I can heah.”

‘I leaned forward, watching the head. This was just mummary, I knew, but I had to watch that head.

‘I knew the house to which the Big Smoke referred. It was the last sign of civilisation we had passed, one hundred and fifty miles to the west, a small stone hut with tiled roof, unlike the wooden, thatched dwellings of Jibaro country.

‘Then my hair began to crawl on the nape of my neck. I felt cold sweat begin to ooze from my pores. I froze in my tracks.

‘*That dried head began to speak!* From the tiny open mouth issued a thin trembling voice speaking in Spanish.

“*La casita es de piedra blanca. Hay dos ventanas. Yo veo un hombre en la puerta, es un soldado . . .*”

‘The head was swaying back and forth, back and forth, and about that time I lost my grip on things and passed out.

‘When I came to the hut was empty of Indians. The head on the post was trembling almost imperceptibly, and the Big Smoke was looking down at me, a mocking sneer on his ebony face.

“Theah, yoh see, white trash? I’s voodoo. Now yoh is ma slave for life—an’ in death.”

‘That night I sneaked into the hut and ripped the mouth cords out of *every white man’s head* that hung on the central post!

‘Mad? Perhaps I was, but I had been shown my way out. The Big Smoke feared those spirits. He controlled them only so long as he could keep their souls in their heads. The soul must escape through the mouth.

‘Then I ran from the hut and hid in the darkness outside. Suddenly I heard a fearful blood-curdling cry and the sound of a huge body lurching round inside the house. Then a black hulk stumbled through the doorway and loomed for a

moment against the stars. I heard hoarse bubbling gasps, and an instant later the Big Smoke crashed full length in the path, his feet drumming a tattoo on the beaten earth.

'A moment later I heard the sound of laughter, excited happy laughter, and a babble of men's voices dwindling in the distance.

'All the rest of that long night I lay there in the bush, scarcely daring to breathe, and not a lance-length from me sprawled the silent corpse of the Big Smoke.

'When the morning broke, I stole over to the body and looked at it. The face was screwed into a terror-stricken mask, the yellow-white of the eyeballs stood out hideously, the mouth gaped open and the tongue was thick and swollen, and on the black throat were the welts of many fingers—fingers that were bone-like in their thinness.

'It was a pleasure to prepare that head. I removed it and stole away into the forest. By that time I was an adept at getting round in the undergrowth. I cured the head as I had seen it done dozens of times, and I was very careful to sew the lips tightly together.

'Then I escaped. I had the golden ear-plugs which the Big Smoke had worn in his ears. I had other gold in a leather pouch, along with extra ammunition for the Big Smoke's .44.

'Finally I won out to the coast and managed to ship home. My hair has been like this since that awful night when the Big Smoke passed out.

'Everything was all right. I was home, and if it wasn't for the kinky-haired doll head I kept on the shelf in my room, which all my friends took for a new kind of Woolworth souvenir, I'd have said it was just a bad dream.

'Then one night I wakened to hear a gasping gurgle close to my ear. It was the mumble of the Big Smoke.

"Jest a little moah! Jest a little moah! One moah string and I'se free. Then I git yoh, white trash!"

'I switched on the light and looked at the head. All save one of the cotton cords that held the lips together had parted from dampness and action of a mouse which had gnawed away while I slept.

'It didn't take me long to put new cords in place, I can

tell you, but every night for the last few weeks I've worked here, and I don't have to face the danger of the night, but I can't sleep in the daytime for fear the Big Smoke will get loose. So I want you to take him, put him in a tight glass case where moths or mice can't get at him, and where I can flash my light on him as I make my rounds, and the attendants can watch him during the day. Then I'll sleep. Will you do this for me? '

As he ceased, he fumbled with the cord of the parcel and opened the paper.

There lay the shrunken head of a negro, tiny, repellent. The tiny eye-slits were closed tightly, the hair curled in a tight kinky mass on the bullet-shaped head, and on the face was a look of horror, perceptible even in the diminutive features which apparently had been carefully moulded to represent the living man. Looking closer I saw that the lobe of each ear was slit and distended. The lips were sewed together with new white cotton cord.

I looked at Benson. He was watching me intently, appealingly.

'Well? '

'Why, of course we'll be glad to take care of it for you,' I said cheerfully, as though I had not listened to as wild a tale as a man ever heard. Privately I thought him the biggest liar I had ever listened to, but he did have a shrunken head, and those grisly things do attract the public. 'Only,' I added, 'I'll have to wait a day or two before I can find a case for it. In the meantime I'll turn it over to the custodian to place in a fumigating vat.'

'You're sure it will be safe there? Mice can't get at it? My God, man, can't you realise what it would mean to me if those lips should become unsealed? Suppose I felt those damned black paws at my throat as I travelled down one of the dark corridors. Suppose *he* got loose and hid out in this building? Can't you imagine the horror of it? '

'Well, mice can't live in fumigating-vats, and, besides, I imagine he'd feel lost in this building if he did get loose.' Benson looked at me fearfully.

'You don't know what you're saying. Oh, I know you

think I'm crazy as a loon, but for God's sake take care of that head! Now I'm going home to enjoy the first good sleep I've had for weeks.'

After he had gone I sat for some time looking at the gruesome, wizened trophy. It was genuine, all right. We have had reports that some cunning Chinamen in Panama have been making bootleg heads taken from paupers' bodies, but they sew the neck slit with ordinary cord instead of a bit of fibre from a vine. This head was sewed in the orthodox manner. As for the soul part of it . . . bosh, the man was just a bit daffy. I've had visitors of his calibre before. There was the little old lady who was so gentle and calm but she went off raving in two minutes, telling me about the disembodied spirit named Harvey who kept invisible watch on her and whispered vile things in her ear as she took the air on top of a Fifth Avenue bus. Benson had been too much alone. He walked at night down the dim corridors alive with the memories of bygone days, and perhaps he had been a prisoner in the Jibaro country, and the sights he had seen were now crystallising in all too vivid form.

I turned the head over to the custodian and forgot it for the moment. I really intended to put it on exhibition that same afternoon, after it had been in the fumigating vat, but other matters came up and I forgot the cursed thing.

Two days after this interview, Benson came to see me again, and I resigned myself to another long tale of hair-raising horrors, but he surprised me by his brevity.

'You haven't put the head on exhibition yet, I notice,' he said, after the greetings were over. 'Would you mind telling me where it is? I—I—don't feel easy unless I can keep it where I can see it.'

'By jove, no I haven't,' I said. 'The custodian took it to the fumigating-vat and I completely forgot it. Glad you reminded me of it. I'll get it immediately.'

I went to the 'phone and rang the front office and asked for the custodian.

'It's his day off and he won't be in until to-morrow morning,' the secretary told me.

'Well, it looks as though we'll have to wait till to-morrow,

Benson. Dickson, the custodian, is off for the day, and he has the key to the fumigating-vat. I'll make a memorandum and have that head out first thing in the morning.'

He appeared to be somewhat relieved, but a trace of anxiety still lingered in his face.

'It'll be in a case by to-morrow, sure?' he pressed.

'Word of honour,' I assured him.

He thanked me and went out.

* * * *

The next morning the head was on my mind, and I fully intended asking Dickson to open the case and get the head for me, but an excited group in front of the unfinished gorilla group in the African hall drove the good intention into thin air.

'What's up?' I asked of the electrician who stood on the fringe of the knot of employees.

'Plenty,' he said solemnly. 'We got a dead man here, and we're waiting for the coroner.'

'Dead man,' I echoed. 'Who is it?'

'Night watchman; a new man. Some one says his name is Benson. Must have had a fit or something. He looks terrible.'

I pushed through the group and bent over the body of a man sprawled in a grotesque heap at the feet of one of the huge mounted simians that loomed over the dead body like an ungainly sinister thing, a setting in that dim gloomy hall fit to be the climax of a movie thriller.

It was Benson. He had fallen on his back. His flashlight was clutched tightly in his right hand, and the time clock, glass shattered for all of its protective covering, lay at the feet of the gorilla. I looked at the clock. It had stopped at ten minutes past twelve.

Someone had thrown a piece of canvas over the face of the corpse. I lifted the fabric and stared at the features of the man who had been in my office the day before. In truth the man must have died of some sudden seizure. The eyeballs protruded, the tongue showed thick and swollen through blackened lips. I bent closer . . . merciful God . . . *the throat . . .*

I whirled and dashed for the door.

'Dickson! Get Dickson!' I called.

He came on the run.

'For heaven's sake, man,' he gasped, 'what on earth is the matter with you?'

'The key, man, the key! Open the fumigating-vat immediately!' I said, and I trembled in spite of myself.

'It's empty,' he answered. 'Oh, by gosh, I intended telling you something. You know that head . . .'

'Yes, that's it, the head, what did you do with it? Where is it? Quick, tell me, *where is that head?*' I seized him by the shoulders and shook him. I felt that I must be going mad.

Dickson gaped at me.

'You crazy?' he asked, wrenching away from me. 'Keep your shirt on and I'll tell you. I intended doing it before I left, but it slipped my mind—didn't amount to anything but I thought I ought to mention it—'

'Out with it! Quick, for the love of Heaven, Dickson, where have you put that head? I've got to know,' I snapped.

'Well, when you brought it in to me I started to take it downstairs, and by accident the strings dangling from the lips caught on the door and yanked loose. I thought I'd better mend it and took it back to my desk, but some one called me away just then and I forgot all about it. That's all there is to it. The head is on my desk now. Satisfied?'

For a moment I thought I was going to keel over. Strings pulled out . . . head on desk . . . Lips unsealed . . . and there in the gloom of the African hall lay all that was mortal of Benson with a set of cruel deep welts on his throat.

It was broad daylight, but I swear to this day that I heard far off a throaty terrible chuckle, receding into the distance, and a voice that chilled me to the bone jeeringly say:

'*Crawl, white trash. Ah holds yoh now foh good. Git down an' crawl!*'

A mad, terrible voice.

But Dickson couldn't hear it, and now they say I'm a bit cracked because I wired the lips of a shrunken head shut with heavy copper wire, and keep it in a sealed case.

They don't know what Benson knew and what I know.

THE SCREAM

HESTER HOLLAND

FROM one of the rooms upstairs there came a prolonged shriek. A shriek expressing deadly fear. A woman's voice which rose to a pitch of agonised intensity and then abruptly ceased.

Colonel Dawson sprang to his feet, exclaiming, 'There it is again!' Mrs. Dawson sat quivering in her chair.

It was not the first time they had heard that cry and that this small drama downstairs had been enacted. At first the woman would jump up and mount the stairs to find out what was the tragedy above, but now she kept her seat. What was the use? So often had they gone upstairs together, had hunted the house for the owner of that terror-stricken voice—had called the servants and made inquiries—all to no avail. There was never any one who could tell them who had screamed, no one who could elucidate the mystery.

If they had only known of it before! thought poor Mrs. Dawson. If they had only not bought the house! But it had seemed such an excellent house and in every way suited to an elderly couple just returned from India and wanting to settle down—Colonel Dawson, a somewhat crochety gentleman, and his wife, patient and peace-loving, wishing only a quiet place and home life after years of moving round from one station to another. And when they thought they had found the ideal spot, within easy distance of Guildmore, with its golf-links and pleasant society, when they had bought 'The Elms' and arranged it to their liking, then on the first evening of their moving in came that piercing cry—a cry which no one could explain.

Mrs. Dawson's eyes went instinctively to her husband. It was he who took the mystery most to heart. For her, although it upset her every time she heard the scream, it did not

interfere with her life. She was placid and not easily disturbed. Colonel Dawson, accustomed to being obeyed and to having things logical and downright, was badly shaken by a thing which was inexplicable. It kept him awake at night. He used to spend his days—days so empty now compared with the busy ones passed in India—roaming round the house, tapping walls, rattling windows. Could it be rats? Could it be the wind? Could it be imagination? To the first supposition the house showed a clean bill. No mice or rats had their being there. The good old Siamese cat which the Dawsons had brought with them from the East kept the fort as far as that was concerned. Also, although the house was old, it was extremely well built and free from draughts.

Still, old Dawson insisted that there must be a logical reason to account for the scream they heard. He questioned the neighbours and discovered the cry had been heard often before but the reason for it never found. People had left the house because of it. Dawson refused to believe in anything supernatural.

‘It’s all nonsense—a pack of fools. Do you think I’m going to be told at my age that somebody screams up in one of the bedrooms when there isn’t anybody there to scream? Preposterous! I’ll find out the reason or die in the attempt.’ So to Colonel Rodcliffe, another settler in Guildmore, as they strode down the golf course one morning.

The Colonel examined the end of his brassie with great care, then he said,

‘“There are some things in heaven and earth, Horatio, which are not dreamt of in our philosophy”.’

Colonel Rodcliffe was a bit of a dreamer. Dawson decided then and there that he was no earthly good except for a game of golf.

‘You mean to tell me,’ he spluttered, ‘that you expect me to believe that this noise I hear every night is nothing more or less than a ghost?’

‘I think it’s something very like it.’

‘Ridiculous rot!’ Dawson’s voice rose to a high key, which his wife knew well meant that he was getting over-

excited. 'Ridiculous rot—piffle! A noise and no one there to make it! Why there must be some one there!'

His companion was a tactful man; besides, Dawson played a good game, and good players were somewhat at a premium around Guildmore; therefore he said,

'Of course, I dare say there is some very good reason if only it could be found.'

'I should think there is a good reason, and I shall find it before I'm much older.' Still, he had been six weeks in the house and had not run the mystery to earth.

Mrs. Dawson also questioned the ladies who called on their new neighbours. Mrs. Barton, who had been a resident for many years, told her that 'The Elms' had been sold and let and sold again all because of 'the scream,' as she called it. 'It is always heard at the same time. About eleven at night, isn't it? No one ever hears it again during the night and fortunately the servants' rooms are so distant, and they are nearly always in bed at that hour. It would be so tiresome if the servants heard it, because they would not stay, and it is so difficult to get domestics here. The shortage of good servants is a very great drawback to Guildmore, dear Mrs. Dawson.'

'Yes, but what makes the . . . who makes the noise?'

'Oh, no one knows that. The Brewsters had a medium down from town to try and find out what the scream was. She, they said, was no good. I don't understand these things myself. But, anyway, the Brewsters left. Such nice people, too.'

'But surely there must be some explanation?' Mrs. Dawson had not lived with an exacting husband for more than forty years without having been tinged with his love for getting to rock bottom. 'There must be some reason why we hear that noise, even if—if—'

She was going to say 'even if it is a ghost who makes it,' but again her husband's influence stepped in and she could hardly frame the word. It did seem so impossible that a perfectly normal house which had been inhabited always by perfectly normal people should have developed a shriek of such extreme and ghastly horror.

Colonel Rodcliffe was more helpful when she met him at a garden-party soon afterwards. He said he was sorry her husband seemed so jumpy these days. He had known Dawson slightly when they were stationed at Delhi, and had always thought of him as a very sound type of man, as free from nerves as a jelly-fish. It was sad to see him degenerating into a shaky old crock.

‘And all for the sake of a little imagination,’ thought Colonel Rodcliffe with a sigh. ‘Why can’t he let the scream scream? It does him no harm. He needn’t use that room. People fuss too much about what they don’t understand. As if people ever understood anything!’

But to Mrs. Dawson, he said, ‘Sorry your husband’s looking seedy. I should try to sell the house if the thing is getting on his nerves.’

‘But he won’t sell it. He says he will find out the reason for the noise.’

‘But if there isn’t a reason . . .’

‘Oh, Colonel Rodcliffe there must be one. Why should something scream like that just for nothing?’

‘Does your husband admit that there is some one who screams in that room? I thought he still persisted it was rats.’

‘He doesn’t know what to think.’

‘He’s been out in India right up to the Himalayas. I should have thought he would have believed in this sort of funny business by now. I’ve seen odd things done there which would make me believe anything was possible. Mind you, I don’t think any one’s playing a trick or anything like that, not by auto-suggestion or anything of that kind, but odd things do happen, there’s no doubt about that.’

‘Oh, I know there are odd things, but I just wish they wouldn’t happen where John is. It’s too bad, just when we were settled in so nicely and I’d got John fairly resigned to having to come home and live in a small way and all that.’

Poor Mrs. Dawson spoke fretfully. She was the type of woman who gets fretful. Colonel Rodcliffe looked sympathetic. After all, Army people ought to stick together.

‘Would you like me to come over one evening?’ he suggested. ‘Mind you, I don’t say I could do any good, but

I've never heard the 'scream' as you call it, and it might give your husband some satisfaction for another person to hear it and give an opinion . . . you know what I mean . . . ?

The suggestion was accepted with many thanks.

Rodcliffe found Dawson more jumpy than he had imagined him to be. They sat together in the hall, a cosy place with its blazing fire and brightly burning lights. Above them was a little gallery, and the principal bedrooms opened out of this. Any sound could be more easily heard from the hall than the drawing-room or the Colonel's smoke-room.

About ten o'clock Rodcliffe suggested that he and his host should go upstairs and have a look at the room from which the cry was said to come. He knew that this room was unused, and he was anxious to see it—also he was getting rather tired of his companion's demeanour. The latter did nothing but wander around the hall, fiddling with the various oddments and curios which he had brought back with him from abroad, and once or twice Rodcliffe saw him pick up and examine a long sharp knife which hung suspended from the wall. To break with this state of mind, therefore, he said,

'Suppose we go up and see this room of yours, didn't you say the cry comes at eleven o'clock? By the way, have you ever been in the room at that time?'

Dawson shook his head. No, he had never brought himself to wait for the noise in the room itself. He felt he could not bear to have proof positive that what he persistently thought was rats or wind was just a voice with no one there to make it. Though he did not tell this to his friend, Rodcliffe understood, but at the same time considered it would be a good thing to get Dawson up there. If he was once convinced it was a sound which was not caused in any material way, a thing which was inexplicable from a worldly point of view, then Dawson might give up the struggle to discover its source and leave the house and so bring peace to his wife's mind and to his own.

'Come along then,' he said cheerfully. 'Let us go upstairs and sit in the room. You will excuse us, Mrs. Dawson?'

He had already suggested this scheme to her and she had

timorously agreed. The two men went upstairs together, Rodcliffe carrying a siphon and Dawson the whisky-decanter.

'Not that we are going to imbibe too freely,' said the guest laughingly to Mrs. Dawson. 'But I may have to dose your husband if anything does happen.'

Rodcliffe told himself he was sorry for the little woman. What a life she must be leading with this irritable nervy man, who was too stubborn to believe that there are things which cannot be understood by our feeble brains and therefore are best left alone!

The room in question was a small one, and partially empty, with dust-sheets thrown over the few pieces of furniture which it held. Dawson pulled off the covers of a couple of chairs and turned on the gas-fire. The electric-light globe burned brightly, free from a shade.

'You see, we don't use this room at all,' he explained.

Rodcliffe was walking round the room as Dawson had so often done. Not that he thought for one moment there was anything to be gained by the process, but one should always know one's ground. The walls, he noticed, were thick and well-papered. No holes or crevices. Everything clear and up to date.

'I thought it might come from the water,' said Dawson, pointing to a basin and tap in a corner of the room, 'but I had a plumber up to see and he said it couldn't possibly make a noise like that.'

'Fool,' thought Colonel Rodcliffe.

They sat and waited.

Suddenly through the room, vibrating in a shrill note of agony, came the sound—a woman's shriek of terror—long drawn out and shrill. The walls seemed to vibrate to the sound when it had ceased.

'There,' whispered Dawson. 'There now, what do you think of that?' Oddly enough, he began to laugh. His laugh was a nasty one, a chuckling, mirthless one.

Rodcliffe took him by the arm.

'Look here, old man, you had better come down. I'm sorry I got you up here. Have a drink and come down.'

'You see, it's a real cry.' Dawson had stopped laughing

and spoke very slowly, as if he had discovered a tremendous truth. 'It's a real cry but there is nobody here to make it.'

'We'll get down to your wife,' said his friend brusquely. 'And I advise you to clear out of this house. It's not a healthy place to live in. I'll start investigations, if you like, and find out whether anything odd happened in it. It's about fifty years old, I believe. Anyway, come along now.'

He got a good grip of the old man's arm and led him from the room. Downstairs they found Mrs. Dawson, white and timorous.

'He won't leave the house,' she whispered. 'It's affecting his brain. My husband has always been so determined, you know; he never would be gainsaid or argued with. I'm frightened about him.'

'Leave it to me,' said Rodcliffe. 'I'll go up to Scotland in a day or two and I'll take him along up there. It will do him all the good in the world.'

By dint of much coaxing from both his wife and his friend, Dawson was persuaded to leave the house and to go up to Scotland. His wife moved into an hotel near by and soon recovered her placid state of mind. Meanwhile Rodcliffe wrote to the agents who had sold the house. He inquired about the history of 'The Elms'—upon what site it had been built, and whether they could tell him of any crime or untoward happening that had occurred there. No one could give him any information. The house, so far from having a ghastly history, had a particularly wholesome and normal past. It had been built on a piece of land bought by builders for that purpose, which had belonged to a wealthy man who had died in his bed, and upon whose property no tragedy had ever occurred.

Colonel Rodcliffe received this information while he and Dawson were in Scotland, and the owner of 'The Elms' heard the news with scepticism. Very unwillingly he had come round to the view that there must be something supernatural about his house, but he wanted the reason for it. Rodcliffe deplored the fact that Dawson rather gloated over the idea that some gruesome murder might have been committed there. The thought that there had been nothing of the kind made him angry. He was now becoming difficult

to persuade that the tenant before him had not perpetrated some crime.

‘It’s all a pack of lies. There has been some one killed in that room, and they are afraid to investigate in case something should leak out. But I’ll find it out, mark my words. I won’t let the matter rest.’

In vain the trout swallowed his fly, in vain the mountains with their purple sides called to him a greeting. His thoughts were in Guildmore. He wanted to get back and have it out with the agent for not telling him the truth about the dastardly deed.

Sitting in their snug room in the hotel one night, the talk turned upon legends and spooks.

‘You must have plenty of stories round here,’ Rodcliffe remarked to the landlord, a stout, jolly man who came to smoke a pipe and gossip after supper. Dawson sat silent in his corner.

‘Plenty of stories, sir. Up on those moors men say they’ve seen fairies many a night. But I’m not so sure they had not been making merry.’

‘I believe in fairies,’ said Rodcliffe smiling. ‘And what else have you got besides fairies?’

‘Well, young Ben, Malcolm’s son, is a puny kind of lad. There are tales about him. He’s what they call clairvoyant, sir.’

‘Oh, and what does he see?’

‘His mother was telling me the other day—she says young Ben was sitting on the trunk of a tree watching her pluck a chicken. He’s a cripple, poor lad, but his affliction hasn’t affected his brains, not a morsel. Well, he says to his mother: “Mum, what’s that coffin over there?”’

‘His mother looks round and she says: “There ain’t no coffin, lad.”’

‘“Oh, yes, there is,” says Ben. “It’s a big coffin and it’s resting just inside the barn door yonder.”’

‘Well, his mother knew his ways, so she just got up and went to the barn door; but there wasn’t no coffin, nor anything like a coffin.’

‘Well?’ inquired Rodcliffe.

The landlord paused a minute to make his story more

impressive, then he said: 'Would you believe it, gentlemen, that very next day old Joe Decker died, and three days after that they carried his coffin to the grave. On the way a thunderstorm came on with rain so heavy they had to lay the coffin in Malcolm's barn to wait till it was over. The coffin stood in the very place the lad had said he saw it stand. Would you believe that?'

'It looks,' said Rodcliffe, 'as if time doesn't matter so much after all.'

He glanced at Dawson's motionless figure and thought the old man must be asleep. Mrs. Dawson had written several times to her husband about the sale of 'The Elms'. The agents were finding considerable difficulty in getting rid of the place. The news of the haunting had spread about. Mrs. Dawson was surprised to have no word from her husband; he was usually very punctilious in answering letters. However, she was more surprised when he walked into her hotel one morning and announced his intention of returning to 'The Elms'.

'But where is Colonel Rodcliffe?' she asked.

'Oh, I left him in Scotland. You can have your things moved over at once, Ellen. Everything is the same as it was when we left it, and we can do without servants to-night.'

'But, George,' she exclaimed, 'what about your dinner?'

'Oh, never mind that. I want to get over there to-night.'

And so Mrs. Dawson obediently packed. She was used to hasty flittings but all the same she sighed a little because when one is old one likes a little peace. It was cosy in the hotel, with no scream and nice, chatty people.

Colonel Dawson met her at the door of 'The Elms'. She did not think he looked well, and made haste to get him some tea. There were provisions enough for their simple needs which he had brought in with him. She poached some eggs, mixed a hot drink and put hot bottles in the beds. It puzzled her a good deal that her husband sat so silent and morose, he who used to tramp round the house directing how things should go. She missed his supervision, but like the wise wives of her generation, said nothing. At about half past ten he went up to bed, and she began to put things in order for the night. Presently he called her:

'Ellen, will you come here a minute?'

She mounted the stairs, saying, 'I'm coming—where are you?'

She thought he was in their bedroom, but he was not there, and his voice cried impatiently, 'Ellen!'

'Where are you?' she repeated, and then realised that he had gone into the room she never entered.

'But, George,' she called from outside the door. 'You know it's just on eleven o'clock; come out, dear. You know it will only upset you.'

There was no answer.

Trembling, she pushed the door of that dreaded room half-open and saw her husband seated on the shrouded bed, his face turned towards her, an odd smile on his face.

'Come here, Ellen,' he said.

She took a few steps towards him. She was an old lady now, she thought. It was rather hard to have such nervy goings-on.

'What is it, George?'

'Sit down, Ellen. I want to talk to you,' said Colonel Dawson, speaking slowly and carefully, as if choosing his words. 'Up in Scotland I heard a most peculiar thing. I heard of a boy who saw a coffin—actually saw a coffin standing in a barn before the coffin was put there. It was put there three days later. Wasn't that extraordinary?'

'Put there three days after he saw it,' repeated Mrs. Dawson stupidly. 'I don't understand.' She still stood near the door, for her nerves were keyed up for the shriek, and she was most anxious to be out of the room.

'Come along now, dear,' she implored.

He took no notice, but went on in that strange, slow voice: 'It just shows, doesn't it, Ellen, that time isn't really there at all? What might happen to-night might be seen yesterday. It's something to do with dimensions.'

'I don't understand you,' whispered poor Mrs. Dawson. 'Do come out of this horrid room now . . .' she turned to leave it, but he had sprung from the bed and seized her by the arm.

She gave a gasp, for she had seen his eyes, and they had something in them which terrified her.

Still holding her arm, he went on: "You know, I've been trying to find out the reason for the scream in this room, and now I think I have found the reason. It's not a thing which has happened makes the noise every night. It is a thing which is going to happen. You will help me to find out if my idea is the right one, won't you, Ellen? I know you will."

'What do you mean?'

The woman's lips had gone dry with fear, and her eyes held his in a fascinated stare. He still held her arm with one hand, but in the other she saw the knife which they had brought from India as a curio and which hung in the hall. He raised this knife now, and as he did so she gave a long shriek of agonised fear. One long shriek and then was still. Even as she shrieked, she recognised the sound. It was that which she had heard so often in that room.

The old man crouched over the body gloatingly.

'I knew I was right, Ellen. It was your scream all the time. Your scream in this room night after night . . .'

They found him hours later, crouched upon the bed, gaping and muttering about dimensions and time being of no importance at all, and they took him away.

The scream was never heard again.

SOMEWHERE near midnight, my room telephone rang, and according to well-formed habit, I rolled out of bed and answered almost before I was fully awake.

'Ambulance trip for you, Marsh. Whitby Home.'

That brought me wide awake, and bustling into trousers, shoes, shirt and white uniform coat, I descended to the main office. Dr. Lang, the superintendent, met me at the foot of the stairs with a heavy overcoat.

'Here,' he said, 'put this on. It's a pretty chilly night. Here's your bandage kit—you may need it. Ambulance in the back drive. Explosion and fire out at the Whitby Home. Send back for help if necessary. Now use some speed.'

I used some speed, and when I got into the ambulance the driver used some more. We were up the street at a hazardous rate, the chauffeur giving himself over to the task of driving, while I turned the crank that ran the shrieking signal horn.

The so-called Whitby Home was an obscure little institution occupying a shabby ten-room brick building in a low-class residential district in the outskirts of the city. The place bore a rather evil reputation, and it was hinted that its owner and operator, Dr. Whitby, was guilty of various illegal practices in connection with his hospital work. However, no complaint of any importance had ever been lodged against him, and consequently no investigation of his activities had ever taken place and the general opinion of his character remained unconfirmed.

For aught I knew, the rumours about Whitby might have been born of the natural resentment of all medical men towards a practitioner who declines to be governed by their standards and becomes therefore a 'quack'. For Whitby

had belonged to no medical society; he was careless about collecting anything for his work; and he practised any kind of medical theory, old or new, that happened to appeal to him, totally disregarding the ethics of the profession. He had no general practice, and the inmates of his would-be sanatorium were usually people of little learning and nearly always the victims of disabling accidents. I must mention, however, that my gratification at the thought of investigating the Whitby Home and some of its curious inmates entirely overcame any resentment at losing most of a night's sleep.

In a matter of seconds we drew up as near the place as we could get, the Fire Department having the narrow street blocked. The building was almost completely gutted by the fire when we arrived, and, grabbing my first-aid kit, I ran up to the captain who was directing the fire-fighting to inquire about the victims.

'Only one alive,' he panted. 'Rest all killed in the explosion. Come over here.'

The survivor, whose room had been on the ground floor, had not been injured by the accident, although he had been stunned temporarily by the shock of the explosion. The firemen had wrapped him in a blanket salvaged from the burning house and laid him in a sheltered place to await attention. Passing the mangled bodies of the dead, we found him sitting up, looking a little dazed at the excitement, but feeling cheerful and apparently comfortable. He was a common-looking little man of probably thirty years, a labourer of not very extensive intellect, but alert and sensible in answering our questions. He had been staying at the place on account of the amputation of his left arm a little above the elbow. I sat by his side on the return to the hospital and questioned him regarding the cause of the fire.

'Gas, or gasoline explosion, I guess,' he answered readily. 'Fox, the fellow that did the odd work around the house, was in my room along about ten o'clock, and sat there and talked to me awhile. Finally he said he smelt something like gasoline or escaping gas, that seemed to come down the stairs, and he went up to see about it. After a while, I heard him open the door at the top of the stairway and that's about all I knew till I come to out there in the yard. Some-

thing must've blown the whole of the top of the house to pieces. I was lucky, for I was the only one that slept downstairs. Are any of the rest of 'em—alive? '

No, not a soul, I told him. The patient's face betrayed genuine regret at this.

'Too bad. Doc Whitby was a good fellow. I got this arm cut off in a smash-up at the barrel-stave mill and Doc Whitby just happened along before I even got it strapped up, and he took me in and took care of it ever since, and never asked for a dollar. I had a coupla weeks' wages with me, and I turned that over to him, but he didn't seem very anxious to get it. Wanted me to wait and see what a nice job he'd do on that arm—some new scheme he had.'

Arriving at the hospital I installed my patient in a ward bed, made out his record card in the name he gave me, Simon Glaze, and then proceeded to look after the dressing of his arm, which I found soaking wet. I removed this and applied iodoform gauze, dry, covering it with a linen bandage.

'Aren't you going to soak it up? ' he asked.

'Soak it? No. That's no way to take care of a stump.'

'Doc Whitby kept it wet all the time.'

'That's a new one to me,' I told him. 'We always keep wounds like that clean and dry. You'll be all right with this dressing.'

'Well, maybe,' he said doubtfully, as I left him.

The next morning I went in to have a look at my patient, who had spent rather a bad night.

'Doc,' he began eagerly, 'couldn't you stretch a point and wet this bandage for me? I haven't slept a wink all night with that dry rag on it.'

I wondered what kind of faith cure Whitby had been practising on Glaze, and I maintained my position that the wet bandage was not the proper treatment. Glaze stared at me, with red, sleepless eyes, misery showing in every line of his face.

'Doc,' he finally said, 'I want to talk to the regular top boss of this concern, and I want him pretty soon.'

We had considerable argument over this, but ultimately I went and brought up Dr. Lang in compliance with Glaze's

request. Glaze had been lying face down on his bed during my absence, and when Dr. Lang and I returned we opened the felted door with its silent latch, without a particle of noise and stepped into the room before Glaze was aware of our approach. Dr. Lang started to speak and his heavy voice broke on the stillness of the room with quite a jar. The effect on the patient was most startling. He gathered his legs and his good arm under him like a flash and sprang backward, clear on to the next bed, which fortunately for its occupant was empty at the time, the patient being in the dressing-room.

Lang gasped.

‘Ah, a mental case, as I might have suspected.’

He crossed quickly to where the patient lay, still crouched in the same position, speechless, doubled up. The doctor laid a hand on him, spoke to him, turned him over on his back, all without evoking a word from Glaze, who lay with eyes half-closed like a man playing dead.

‘Well, let’s have a look at the arm anyhow,’ said Lang, and he proceeded to uncover the unresisting man’s stump.

‘Bad looking job,’ he commented. ‘No infection, but just doesn’t look right. I suppose Whitby was trying some wild-cat scheme on him, and so long as he has no infection maybe we’d better continue it for a while just to keep him calmed down. Then we’ll gradually break in on some reliable modern treatment. Didn’t you say he was perfectly rational last night?’

‘He certainly was.’

‘Next time he has a lucid interval just call me, will you, Marsh. No matter what I’m doing. This is an interesting case, and I’d like to know what the late Whitby has been doing to him.’

Some time later in the day, Glaze recovered his poise, and Dr. Lang talked to him at length, questioning him about the treatment administered by Dr. Whitby but the answers only increased our curiosity. Glaze admitted that he had been under chloroform a number of times since Whitby had first cared for his arm stump, which seemed rather unusual to us. Questioned as to the purpose of this, he said he didn’t believe the arm had ever been touched when he was under

the anaesthetic as it was never sore afterwards. There was an injury in the roof of his mouth that bled a good deal, he said, and there were little sore spots on his back that were quite painful for a day or two.

'And then,' he finished, 'there was a good deal of time I can't remember at all. Guess I been kinda feverish or something, for there's long stretches of time go by that I can't remember anything. This morning was one of them.'

'And, say, Doctor, I wonder if you could fix it so that I can have a bath pretty often—say every day, or twice a day. I don't want much hot water—just plain cold is good enough for me. Doc Whitby always let me bathe two or three times a day, and I just can't seem to get enough of it.'

Dr. Lang was interested enough to assent to this, although he hardly expected to collect a cent from the patient. He was retaining Glaze for the satisfaction of his private curiosity.

'That's the weirdest case I ever saw or heard of,' said Dr. Lang to me later. 'Call it intermittent insanity if you want to, but he hasn't a trace of fever nor a sign of locomotor ataxia, both of which lunatics practically always have. In fact, when he is in those silent fits his temperature is actually *below normal*. And how he takes to water! Whatever is wrong with him, it isn't hydrophobia!'

I prepared Glaze's bath for him several times, and he demanded water that was practically unheated, although the time was early winter and the temperature outside well below freezing.

Glaze was removed to a room by himself, with a bath attached, where his eccentricities would bother no one else, and during the next two weeks he showed very little change in symptoms. I was careful not to startle him unduly, but even under the most careful treatment he still showed that curious inclination to double up into a ball and go backward—always backward—away from any one who approached him. His talkative intervals grew shorter, and if allowed he would spend hours in his tub of cold water, hardly moving a muscle.

Making an examination of the arm-stump one morning, I noted for the first time three or four little warty growths

in the suture where the skin had been drawn together over the stump. As the patient was apparently feeling normal at the time, I held a hand mirror up to the stump so that he could see the warts, too, and told him they would probably have to be cut off. He looked intently at the reflection of the end of the stump for a few seconds and then turned to me with a startled expression in his face and voice.

'Don't cut them off!' he pleaded, and on the instant he doubled up again into a ball, rolling on the floor of the dressing room like a wooden thing.

When I told Dr. Lang of this incident, his curiosity at Glaze's behaviour put a severe strain on the doctor's self control.

'If that man Whitby were alive to-day,' he remarked with studied restraint, 'I'd be inclined to put him on the operating table and persuade the truth out of him with a red-hot iron. It's some devilish work of his that makes a man act like a dried armadillo every time any one looks at him. And that subnormal temperature? Where does he get it?'

Two days later we took the somewhat unwilling Glaze into the operating room to care for his unhealthy stump. Dr. Lang of course superintended the work, and the actual cutting had been turned over to my fellow-internee, a young Irishman named Lancey with a flaming red head and a likeable manner, whom everyone considered to be destined for a brilliant future. As I gradually whiffed the ether into the patient's nostrils, Lancey was busy unwrapping the stump. When the cut-off member was exposed, Lancey's eyes rested only for a second on the bits of flesh he was expected to remove; then his whole face changed as if he had been struck by a club.

'Holy cats!' he gasped, his lips turning grey-white. 'Cut out the ether, Marsh. I don't want to operate on *that!*'

I stopped and turned towards Dr. Lang who was a little non-plussed at Lancey's sudden refusal to carry out his commission.

'Pardon my abruptness, Doctor,' apologised Lancey to his superior, 'but I'd like to have six or seven days' time before going ahead with this cutting.'

'You'd like it!'

'Yes, Doctor. If you'll give me a week before you disturb

this man's arm I think I can tell you something about the honourable Dr. Whitby's work that'll make your eyes open. But I've just got to have that much time.'

'One week,' ruminated the superintendent slowly, 'won't kill or cure him in his present condition. I presume we can wait that long. But aren't you forgetting that I'm in charge here and that this man is being kept here solely on my responsibility? Do you have to be so extremely reticent with your theories? I feel that I'm entitled to know something about what you think you've discovered.'

'I know what Whitby has done,' said Lancey simply. 'And in a week I can tell you what he did it with. Can I have that much time?'

'Yes, take your week,' exploded the doctor, with some irritation. 'But I'm holding you strictly responsible for the condition of this patient.'

'That's all right. That's what I want.'

'And I still think you might give me an idea of what you're talking about.'

'Take a look at that then,' pointing to the bared stump.

Dr. Lang scrutinised the growths. As he had not recently been reading on the subject that had given Lancey his sudden inspiration it is possible that he did not see anything definite on Glaze's arm; also it is possible that in his dignified conservatism he doubted even his own eyesight. But as he retreated, dissatisfied and silent, I bent close and looked. What I saw took my breath away and made me wonder if I were really awake. Lancey hurried away, and I trundled the unconscious Glaze back to his bed.

During the next two days Glaze lost nearly all that was left of his normal human instincts and speech. He moved and obeyed mechanically when spoken to, but seemed to understand motion better than speech, so that it was often necessary for me to point to a thing in order to make him comprehend what I wanted. His mania for the cold bath increased, and if I went into his room quietly in the morning I frequently found him doubled into the familiar ball, sleeping with his eyes half open.

Observing Glaze's eyes so much brought out another revelation. Upon first seeing the man I had noticed his bright

intelligent looking eyes which were rather prominent; but now since his recent prolonged lapses into semi-consciousness, I noticed that his eyes were sunk deeper into his head and seemed to be losing their lustre. Now this condition might be induced by anaemia or something of the sort, but Glaze was in the pink of physical condition and not in the least emaciated and I was at a loss to explain the change in his eyes. He had certainly grown less talkative at the same time, and vaguely I wondered if something were influencing a part of his brain, causing it to shrink, and thus by natural consequence causing his eyes to sink farther back in the bony structure. As I sat observing him, it suddenly struck me that the crown of his head seemed to be less prominent than when I first saw him, and after a careful survey I was positive that the man's head was losing its prominent crown and sinking into a more brutish line.

Of course any physician knows that a man's skull can change shape in the course of time, if something happens to develop a new portion of his brain, just as the bones in a coal-heaver's shoulders bend under his heavy load; but a change like that in one's skull would hardly be perceptible in less than two or three years and the apparent alteration in the shape of Glaze's skull in the three weeks we had known him seemed like a preposterous dream of some kind. Not wishing further to upset Dr. Lang, I kept still about this weird discovery until Lancey returned to the hospital that evening, he having been out by special permission all day. Late that night I brought Lancey up and told him about the patient's eyes and asked him what he could see in the shape of his head. While Glaze lay in his habitual stupor, Lancey felt his head and turned it right and left. Then he placed his hands behind him and said,

'It all fits together—perfectly. But, my God, where will it end?'

I could only stare at my friend.

'I've got the whole story, Marsh, up to date. And I don't know but that it would be a kind act to chloroform this poor wretch and let him out of it. I never dreamed it would work so fast. To-morrow, Marsh, I'll tell you all what I have found out.'

And Lancey went back to the laboratory.

I now studied Glaze's habits more closely than ever, for I did want to get some idea about the mysterious case before Lancey had to tell me every detail as if I were a child. Glaze was not inactive all the time. He varied between his rolled-up playing-dead attitude and sudden, snappy, erratic movements. He was beginning to snap at his food and devour it hastily, almost without chewing, and this habit caused him some little stomachic disturbance, as of course it would with anybody. In his frequent visits to the bath-tub he would dive for long periods beneath the surface of the water and come up half-strangled, yet seeming to enjoy it all. And if anything surprised or startled him it was always backwards that he retreated from it—backwards and suddenly.

Finding time to visit Glaze along in the afternoon, I dropped into his room and found him sitting up in his chair, apparently his old cheerful self. I spoke to him gently and without startling him, and he smiled and looked as if he would like to reply, but simply could not. Hoping to draw him out into one more conversation, I sat down beside him and continued talking to him about little things around the house with which he was familiar. Finally, unsuccessful in getting Glaze to talk, I playfully shook hands with him, preparing to leave. The hand that gripped mine nearly broke three of my fingers and the smile left Glaze's face as he shut down on me with a grip of inhuman strength. Tugging at his hand with my own left, in an effort to free my sadly pinched right member, I saw that his thumb reached clear across my own very large palm and had almost an inch to spare. How could I have escaped noticing that huge thumb before? Then I saw the nail. It bore a sharp ridge, like the gable roof of a house, down its centre and it occupied the entire end joint of that monstrous thumb. This certainly had not been the case when I had held Glaze's right hand a few days previously while administering chloroform to him. When I finally extricated my right hand, Glaze kept opening and shutting that huge pincer with a motion that reminded me of the jaws of a hungry alligator.

What was this superhuman influence that caused a man's firmest tissues to alter their shape completely within a few

hours? And what was it that that ghastly gripping claw resembled?

I left the room with cold chills running up my spine.

The next morning Lancey arranged to explain to Dr. Lang, two or three other doctors who had become interested and myself regarding his findings about the mysterious patient, for which purpose they gathered in Dr. Lang's back office at 10.30 o'clock.

You may be sure that it was a highly interested little group that gathered in that room considerably before 10.30, Dr. Lang himself being almost rabidly impatient.

'Well, shoot, Lancey,' he said, before the door had closed behind the last man. And Lancey shot.

'There's just one man in the room I think, who saw and understood what was growing on the end of our patient's arm a week ago to-day. At that time it was four perfectly good little fingers and a model thumb!'

This statement was greeted with voiceless gasps.

'It's something different now—in fact, I hardly know what to call it in its present form, but we'll go up and look at it presently. Anyhow it is now perfectly plain what Whitby tried to do and partially succeeded in doing, was to modify the regenerative process in his patient so that a new forearm would grow in place of the old one.

'The theory is nothing new. As early as 1906 it was observed that when a limb is amputated at the middle of a bone, the bone starts to grow out again, but increases only about one-fiftieth of an inch in length before it is halted by some other influence. You know also of course about the little warts of so-called 'proud flesh' that apparently try to replace the muscular tissue in case of injuries, but which are misshapen or misplaced. What Whitby was trying to get at, as I see it, was to so control these misdirected efforts of nature as to produce a new and perfect limb.

'The human body is already able to repair damaged bones by rebuilding small particles of the bony tissue; it is also able to replace muscle nerve and even finger nail tissues, although in somewhat imperfect forms. Whitby was trying to induce it to build a lost member in perfect form

'Seeking this result, his studies naturally took him to

observing the water animals that have this power of regeneration. A crab, for instance, when it gets a limb broken, promptly bites off the rest of the limb and a new one grows in its place. The same is true of the lobster family, down to the tiny crawdad, no larger than a cricket. Specimens of these little creatures are frequently found with one limb far smaller than the others as a result of such occurrences.

‘It seems that Whitby has been experimenting for years with the ductless and other glands of shellfish in pursuance of this theory of regeneration. And we have upstairs the living proof that he was able to prepare a glandular extract that changes the bodily cell structure as well as influencing the building up processes of nature; but it appears that he never succeeded in isolating one influence from the other, both being present in his preparation.

‘I have found that Whitby bought the little crawdads, which are really dwarf lobsters, from children round his neighbourhood and that his purchases ran into tens of thousands of these little creatures, and I also find that he bought live lobsters in a quantity that his dining table would never have warranted.

‘In short, this patient, Simon Glaze, has had his body so saturated with the glandular extracts from lobsters that he has actually developed regenerative powers, and the bits of proud flesh on his arm stump which you saw only a week ago became quite well developed fingers. At that time, of course, they were getting natural human material for their reconstruction. All that has changed now and as a result of the other influence of his medication he is now becoming more and more every day to resemble a gigantic shellfish, in both body and mind—if a shellfish can be credited with a mind.

‘You remember what he told about a wound in the top of his mouth? That was the easiest access to the region of his pituitary gland, a seat of powerful influence over any structural change in a man’s body. Other injections were administered along his spinal column, and I firmly believe that Whitby was successful in providing the man with something that he has used since Whitby’s death in promoting the change, not understanding the real results.’

I objected a moment to state that Glaze had positively had,

possession of nothing he had brought from the Whitby Home. At that Dr. Lang leapt to his feet, suppressing an oath. 'I've got it,' he ejaculated, his steel-blue eyes snapping. 'This infernal lunatic Whitby was afraid that somebody would take his patient away from him before he got through his nice little experiments. So he just lodged bodies of oil soluble extracts along his spinal column where they would continue to be picked up in the lymph. In this way he has gone on poisoning and wrecking this poor wretch of a labourer after he himself is dead and in where ever such people belong! We'll go up now and have an X-ray made and see if anything can be done.'

The unfinished lecture broke up and Lancey, Lang and I went up to Glaze's room immediately. As we waited for the elevator Lancey finished explaining to Dr. Lang.

'That nice little set of fingers has now turned to an almost perfect lobster claw, only two fingers of the original five having developed, both with scissor-like claws. His good right hand is to-day nearer a lobster claw than anything else. His speech is gone. His temperature is 93 degrees instead of a normal of 98. His backward leaps when startled are the behaviour of a crawfish. And the occipital bones of his head are shrinking day by day. Above all, note his fondness for water, especially on his stump. A crab could not grow a new limb except in a wet place.'

We hurried into Glaze's room and on into the bathroom beyond, where he spent so much time. In the tubful of cold water we found Glaze's nude body, doubled and curled up, face far down under the water—dead.

'Poor devil!' said Lancey, as we extracted the body and laid it upon the bed. 'His lobster brain taught him that the only safe place for him was under water, but he lacked the lobster's breathing apparatus. Well, it's better this way, after all.'

PIGMY ISLAND

EDMOND HAMILTON

RUSSELL dived sharply from the yawl's deck as the last great wave struck and submerged it. He rose and sank in the foam-churned surf, then rose again and with great strokes fought towards the shoreline he could glimpse through the spray. The waters were thunderous in his ears and behind him the descending sun lit the world with coppery fire.

As he struggled on Russell was aware by brief glimpses that the beach ahead was nearer. The giant waves from behind bore him forward towards it in great leaps, but the deadly undertow gripped his feet with serpent grasp to pull him back. He kicked, struggled, and at last felt firm sand beneath his feet, and staggered up on to it beyond the clawing grasp of the waves.

He looked about him dazed for a moment by his struggle with the furious ocean. He was standing on the beach of an island some three miles in length. Its surface, clothed green with sycamore and oak and brush, sloped gently up to higher ground at the island's centre.

A sound came to Russell's ears over the roar of the surf, and he half-turned. Down from the island's wooded centre by a narrow path a shirt sleeved and hatless man was hastening towards him. As he approached, Russell saw that he was over middle age, with quick eyes and a keen, intellectual countenance beneath his greying hair. His face held anxiety as he came closer, hand outstretched.

'My dear sir! I saw your boat floundering from my place—but it seems it was all over before I got here. You're not hurt?'

'More chagrined than hurt,' Russell managed to smile, 'They told me over in Charleston that if I went too far out

from the coast the squalls would get me, but I thought I could pull the yawl through them.'

The other seemed relieved. 'Well, it was as narrow an escape as I've ever seen. These squalls are treacherous—and if you hadn't been near this island—'

'It was just dumb luck that I was,' Russell admitted. 'And I never looked to find any one here till you appeared. Most of the islands this far off the Carolina coast are uninhabited, aren't they?'

'Most of them are,' said the other, 'but this one happens to be the site of the Northern University Biological Station. You've heard of it, perhaps?'

'Of course.' Russell was interested. 'Over in Charleston I heard.'

'I'm Dr. James Garland, the bio-chemist of the station and just now its only member,' the other introduced himself. 'There are, ordinarily, half a dozen of us here—Dr. Wallace, the head, Professor Lowerman, and three others, but they've all gone off to Charleston for a vacation and I'm the unlucky one who stays here to tend their routine-work while they're gone.'

'Russell's my name,' the younger man replied. 'Just one of New York's struggling young attorneys, on a trip south in a yawl that I always thought I could manage, till now.'

Dr. Garland smiled. 'I'm afraid you'll have to put in a few days here with me until the others get back, for they went in our only boat. If you can put up with a somewhat irregular one-man household—'

'Crusoes can't be choosers,' Russell told him. 'Besides—I've heard something about this station—I'm really glad of the opportunity to visit it.'

'Well, you'd better begin by changing to dry clothes,' observed the other. 'Lowerman's about your size—I'm sure he'd be glad to lend you anything of his if he were here.'

He led the way across the beach and along the narrow path that twisted upwards through the spring-green woods. The sun was sinking lower behind them, and the keen sea-wind, striking Russell's dripping garments, soon had his teeth chattering. He was glad enough when they came out into the more sparsely wooded plateau that was the island's highest

part, and glimpsed the squat frame bungalow and the long and broad unpainted frame building some distance behind it.

'The laboratories,' Garland gestured towards the latter structure. 'I'll show you all over them later, but just now the quicker you change, the better.'

Russell followed him into the bungalow and across a roomy living-room with comfortable masculine furnishing to one of the bedrooms at the rear. There the bio-chemist dug from a mass of carelessly piled clothing and impedimenta a set of garments that were well-worn but dry and warm. When Garland left him with them darkness was falling, and Russell switched on the lights.

Arrayed in the dry clothes he ventured back into the living-room and found Dr. Garland busy with rolled-up sleeves in the surprisingly neat little kitchen. Russell, proficient in a boat's galley, helped him prepare the meal that they were soon falling upon, their only conversation the occasional monosyllables of hungry men at table.

Sitting before the blazing fire-place a little later and smoking one of the cigarettes his host had proffered, Russell reflected that there were, indisputably, worse places. Over the whine of winds outside there came to his ears the dim thunder of the distant surf. He hitched his chair-closer to the comforting fire.

'I'm really immensely interested in your place here,' he told the other. 'I heard quite a bit about it over in Charleston.'

'All of it good?' asked his host quizzically and Russell grinned.

'Well, as a matter of fact some of them did talk a good deal of rot about you and your friends. They had some melodramatic whispers about something pretty diabolical going on out here, and I gathered that you are all regarded as so many Twentieth Century Friar Bacons by a good many of them.'

Garland laughed, blowing smoke from his cigarette.

'Friar Bacon's a good example,' he said. 'The ignorance of modern people is often amazing, and the mere fact that we came to this lonely spot to set up our research station

was enough to let those good people know that we were up to something that we wanted to keep hidden.'

'It is rather an unusual spot for a research station, isn't it?'

'Not at all,' Garland promptly disclaimed. 'The main purpose of this station is to make an exhaustive study of the evolutionary difference between some of the lower invertebrate sea-creatures. For that reason a sea-location with varied depths and conditions is necessary; so when we started the station we persuaded the university to let us come here. Of course we all have our own side-lines here still—Wallace has his chromosomes, and Snelling his cell-theory, and I my size-changing work—but we've all got to spend most of our time on the station's main research or the university wouldn't support it long.'

Russell caught at one of the phrases. 'Your size-changing work?'

The bio-chemist waved his cigarette. 'My pet hobby. I've been able to stimulate the pituitary's functioning to an unheard-of degree, or to halt it almost altogether. Of course, control is still rather a problem.'

'I'm afraid you'll think me deplorably ignorant,' Russell said, 'but that means as much to me as algebra to a Hottentot.'

Garland laughed. 'These schools! What do they teach you nowadays? Well, the thing's simple enough in theory. You know, I suppose, that the size of a human or animal body is directly dependent on the functioning of the pituitary gland?'

'I seem to have heard something about a gland controlling the body's size,' Russell admitted.

'No doubt,' said Garland dryly. 'Well, the pituitary gland, which is located near the centre of the head, does actually control the size of the body by its secretions. If it secretes normally, your body is of normal size. If it secretes more than normally, you are a giant. If it secretes less than normally, you are a dwarf. Now since that fact became known—I hope you will pardon my classroom manner, but for years I dinned these facts into sophomores—since that fact became known biologists all over the world have been attempting an artificial regulation of the body's size by means of it. That

is, they have sought to stimulate or lessen the gland's secretions, and so increase or decrease the body's size.

'This experimentation has been on the whole rather fruitless so far. It's true that by tampering with the gland biologists have been able to make some animals a little larger or smaller than normal, but that's all they've been able to accomplish—a mere stunting or hastening of growth. The fact is that the ductless glands like the pituitary and thyroid are such delicate organisms that when we tamper with them surgically we damage them nine times out of ten. I became aware of that years ago, so left it off and started working from a different point of attack.

'I have—' Garland suddenly halted, rising to his feet. Grasping a heavy stick of firewood, he stepped softly to the door, then flung it suddenly open.

Russell, amazed, heard the quick scurrying of something on the veranda outside as the door was flung open. For a moment Garland gazed intently out into the darkness, then closed the door.

'Damn them—they get bolder every day!' he exclaimed angrily.

'Rats?' asked Russell, and the other looked over at him and nodded.

'And cursed annoying ones too,' he said irritably. 'Under the house and laboratory and all around them, yet you can't lay hands on them at all.'

His brow cleared as he resumed his seat. 'Where was I? Oh, yes. Well, as I was saying, I've gone at this problem of the pituitary gland in a different way. I said to myself, why cut open the head and take immense risks to reach the gland, when through the blood that nourishes it we can reach it quite easily? I said, what if I devise a compound which when injected into the blood-stream will in time flow through the pituitary gland and excite it into unheard-of activity? And what if I work out an opposite compound that will reach the gland in the same way through the blood, but that instead of stimulating will halt, or almost halt its functioning? You perceive what that would mean?'

Russell's brow puckered. 'Why, good Lord!' he exclaimed.

‘That would enable you to increase or decrease the body’s size at will!’

Garland bowed. ‘You see it. So I set to work devising the two necessary compounds. The thing seemed clear in theory, but I don’t mind saying that it’s proved cursed difficult in actual fact. Nature’s a mistress whose work is mighty hard to change. But I’ve plugged away, at the university and here, until I have the formulas for my two compounds all worked out, and have been able to make enough of them to prove their efficacy beyond any doubt.

‘I take a dog, for instance. I inject into one of his arteries leading into the head the stimulating compound. Soon that compound carried by the blood-stream, reaches the pituitary gland, and at once, by reason of its irritant effect upon the gland, spurs it to tremendous activity. It throws its secretions into the dog’s body at a terrific rate. I may say parenthetically that the injection produces coma almost at once in the subject. Within a day that dog, lying in coma, will have increased its bodily size to a giant dog six times its normal stature, if the stimulating compound has been injected in sufficient quantity. It will wake as a giant dog and will remain that size indefinitely; the compound in the gland stimulating it unceasingly until neutralised by the opposing compound.

‘You will say, that dog increases six times in actual bulk and weight in its day of coma; how can that be? I ask in turn how did the dog increase from a small puppy to a full-grown dog in a year? It did so because in the food it ate and the air it breathed it took in food elements that its body-organisms turned into tissue. Had it breathed more or eaten more it would not have grown faster, for the body organism can only assimilate the food-elements at a certain rate and that rate is directly dependent upon the secretions of the vital pituitary gland.

‘But by immensely increasing their secretions, I have immensely accelerated the rate at which the body-organism can assimilate food-elements. The sleeping dog in its coma does not eat, but it breathes. The air it breathes contains in itself and in its carbon dioxide and water-vapour all the vital food-elements of oxygen, nitrogen, carbon and hydrogen.

These elements are assimilated thus from the breathed air by the body-organism at a tremendous rate, cells forming into tissue and bone at incredible speed, building up a body several times the size of the normal body.

'If the opposite compound were injected, it would slow the secretion of the pituitary gland, and with that vital function almost halted, the body would begin to throw off its own tissues at immense speed. By the familiar waste-processes of exhalation of air and perspiration it would throw off matter from itself at an unheard-of rate until it had reached a size consonant with the reduced functioning of its vital glands. If that compound were injected the dog would wake from its coma of a day to find itself but a fifth or a sixth of its normal size. That the whole process would work in exactly the same way with a human being I have no doubt whatever.'

Russell shook his head. 'And you've really made these compounds? You've actually tested them on animals?'

'Of course—and with very great success. But that success will have to be complete before I can publish.'

'It seems like something out of fairy-tales,' the younger man commented. 'Of course I don't doubt your word—but to make a living thing greater or smaller in size—it's one of those things you'd have to see to believe.'

Garland laughed, relighting his cigarette. 'Simple enough,' he said. 'I'll show you something over in the laboratory to-morrow that will make you believe. I could show you to-night, but I'm afraid your dreams would be rather nightmarish.'

'Speaking of dreams makes me realise that I'm half into them now,' said Russell, yawning. 'I don't know why I feel so sleepy to-night . . .'

'The usual effect of scientific discourse,' commented Garland. 'Don't apologise—I'm used to it—my classrooms were veritable halls of Morpheus when I got well into a lecture.'

'Much more likely it's the effect of my tough time to-day,' replied Russell, laughing. 'That same room's mine for to-night? Well, I hope I'll be wakeful enough by morning to look at your experiments.'

'Don't worry, you will be,' retorted the other, smilingly. 'You're the first society I've had for a week, and as such you can't hope to escape without being bored mercilessly.'

Russell found himself stretching and yawning hugely as he prepared to retire, and it seemed to him that his head no sooner rested on the pillow than he was slipping into sleep. He half-heard a scratching and scurrying somewhere in the room's wall or floor, but was on the last rim of consciousness by then, and in another moment had drifted off it into dreamless slumber.

When he came back to wakefulness, his first sensation was of a strange tingling in all his body, accompanied by a recurring nausea. He stirred, rubbed his eyes, sat up, his movements seeming oddly clumsy to him. He opened his eyes, blinking, looking around him with an irritated incomprehension that in a moment more had changed to stupefaction. His heart leapt uncontrollably.

He was not in bed in the room where he had retired, but was resting, quite unclothed, upon a thick mass of folded cloths that made a small pallet. It rested directly on the floor, but the floor itself was of smooth glass that was apparently immensely thick. And all around Russell there rose the gleaming walls of a great glass room, illuminated by clear sunlight.

He staggered to his feet, uttering an inarticulate cry. For almost a score of feet above him, apparently, rose the foot-thick glass walls. In them was no door or window or opening of any kind. They came to an end above with the glass room's ceiling or roof quite open and roofless. Russell stumbled to the glass wall of his prison and gazed dazedly through it.

Another hoarse cry came from him, for he was gazing out on a scene that seemed at the same time unutterably familiar yet unutterably strange and grotesque. The great glass room seemed to rest upon a long gleaming platform of burnished metal, scores of feet in width and hundreds in length. Upon it there rested here and there objects familiar in shape, metal and glass beakers and retorts, balance scales and microscopes, but all of size gigantic. The microscope's great tube loomed

for twice Russell's height into the air! He could have hidden in the beaker!

He swayed to another of his glass prison's four walls. From it the view was different—a window a short distance from the glass wall. But the window was colossal in size, too, on a scale with the microscope and beakers. Through it he made out the fiery disk of the descending sun, and against it outside swung branches that seemed of trees huge beyond all experience.

Russell, strange sounds in his throat, reached another wall, and saw that from it the view was one of a room, a colossal room of cathedral proportions but rectangular in shape, with white walls and ceiling and with huge tables and chairs several times his own height ranged along it. And it was on the metal top of one such table that his square glass prison rested!

There came to his giving brain a flash of vague remembrance and comprehension—Garland's talk of the night before—Garland's calm statement of his power—and Russell, his mind submerged in horror, sank to the gleaming floor.

Into his stunned brain the next instant penetrated a great clicking and clashing sound from the distance that brought him to his feet in a bound. One of the great doors at the vast room's end had swung suddenly open and there had stepped inside an appalling figure. A man colossal! Between thirty and forty feet into the air he seemed to loom, a giant who came towards Russell's glass prison with thundering tread. And it was Garland! Garland—his eyes keen with interest as he bent over the glass enclosure. As his huge head loomed over the glass room's open top, Russell could only stare upward, paralysed. Then he saw the great lips moving and there came down to him the rumbling thunder that was Garland's voice.

'I promised I would show you something that would make you believe in my work, Russell,' he said. 'Well, behold that something—yourself!'

'Garland, damn you!' Russell was sobbing in his rage and terror. 'What have you done to me? Made me like this—made a pigmy—out of a human being!'

The scientist's vast laugh thundered. 'Don't take it so hard, Russell. You're not the first one to find yourself a foot in

height—Wallace and Lowerman and the others of my esteemed co-workers are no larger than you—so you're not alone.'

'Wallace—' Russell almost forgot his own terrible situation in that revelation. 'Then Wallace and the others—you did the same—'

'The same as to you,' the great voice rumbled. It became suddenly again thunderous. 'Do you think that I would restrict my theory always to animals and never try working it out on men? Men—the mere raw material of experimentation to me! So many guinea pigs to aid test-tube and microscope in the search for truth!' His great eyes burned.

'I perfected the two compounds two weeks ago, Russell. I drugged the other five, Wallace and Snelling and Lowerman and Johnson and Hall. I injected the gland-depressant compound, the size-decreasing compound, into the neck-arteries while they lay in that drugged sleep. Of course it would have been just as easy to use the other compound, but I knew too well what their reactions would be, when they woke, to try making the unsuspecting subjects of my experimentations giants!

'Through the next score of hours the bodies of the five shrank almost visibly before me, their tissues disintegrating and being thrown off at a terrific rate. I brought them here to the laboratory when they had ceased shrinking, each a pigmy man, hardly a foot in height, like you. I had prepared a crude prison for them and meant to use the size increasing compound on them when they woke. That way, you see, I could test it without danger of making them large enough to be formidable to myself. They were dazed and crazy with rage and all that when they woke, of course, just as you are, but I counted on making the second test even against their will. So many guinea-pigs to me!

'But they escaped, damn them! My prison for them had been too crude, and they got away in the night, got down one of the rat-holes in the laboratory here and have been lurking around and under the place ever since. You heard them last night at the door? I hope the rats get them—and they surely will in time—a foot-high man is no match for a full-grown rat or snake, I assure you.

'But I had to have another subject to go on with the experiment, and fate sent me you, Russell. I would have swum out in that surf to rescue you if you hadn't got ashore. I wanted you so badly to work on. Well, you ought to know the rest. You were so sleepy because your food was drugged last night, and in the twenty-odd hours since then you've had the size-decreasing compound in your pituitary, have been shrinking in size every minute until you're the magnificent pigmy proof of my work that you are now. And now I can give the other compound, the size-increasing one, its final tests on you.'

As Garland spoke, he placed on the table and opened a narrow black case. It held two six-inch glass tubes, one filled with a bright red liquid and the other with a brilliant green one, and also a hypodermic needle of odd design.

Russell was raging futilely at the great head bent above him. 'Garland—you fiend! You're mad—mad!'

Garland was calmly withdrawing the liquid-tubes from their case. 'Quite possibly,' he admitted. 'Madness and genius are so closely akin that no one has ever been able to mark their exact dividing line. Are all madmen merely geniuses of an order incomprehensible to us? An interesting thought.'

'But you'll go no further with your insane experiments on me,' cried Russell.

'You'll do well to remember, Russell, that on me depends your one chance of regaining your normal size. I make no promises, but—'

Russell shook his head grotesquely toward the looming giant face. 'No—I'll die this way first, Garland! You've made a pigmy—a monster of me—but you'll get no chance to go farther with your devilish work on me.'

Garland slipped the liquid-tubes imperturbably back into the case. 'Quite illogical,' he remarked. 'I'll give you until morning, Russell, and if you're still so obstinate, I think I can bring you to terms. A few large spiders put in with you—they'll seem terrible in size and ferocity to you. Really, it would be amusing. You'd better think it over, and lest you have any hope of getting away as the others did . . .'

He drew over the top of the square glass box a sheet of

heavy wirescreen that he fastened tightly over the box's top by means of projecting hasps, through which ran a chain held by a small strong padlock. Fastened thus it formed a strong lattice-work secured over the box's top. With it in place Garland grasped the black case.

'Until the morning, Russell—'

Russell, leaning weakly against the glass wall of his prison, saw Garland's huge form passing down the laboratory, case in hand, and departing through the door he closed behind him.

Left alone, Russell crouched for some moments in silence, unmoving. The sun was sinking outside, he saw, for its level rays were fading and dusk was beginning to thicken in the laboratory corners. There came to Russell dim memory of the sunset—how long before?—that had seen him struggling through the surf towards this island of horror. He strove to think calmly, but his thoughts dissolved with each attempt into unreasoning horror.

He rose, paced along the wall of his glass cage, then with sudden crazy impulse flung himself against it. The impact left him bruised and breathless. He lay for some time, panting, the shadows in the laboratory deepening as night came outside. Through an opposite window, though, an intensifying flood of silver moonlight was pouring into the long room, so vast to his diminished perceptions.

Russell looked up to where the heavy screen that Garland had fastened over his glass prison gleamed dully in the moonlight. It seemed more than twenty feet over his head, and it took but a few futile leaps to convince him that all hope of touching it even was useless. The smooth and perpendicular glass walls gave no slightest hold and there was nothing in his transparent cell to aid him in climbing. There was nothing in fact but the thick mass of dark cloth on which he had lain. Russell tore from it enough of the stuff to form a clumsy tunic, which he tied round him. The garment comforted him oddly.

He sat down, at last, his hope waning, vanishing. Even if he were to escape from his prison, Russell told himself, only Garland and his size-increasing compound could release him from the more terrible prison of his pigmy size. Only

Garland—and he knew without a shadow of doubt that whatever promises Garland might make, he would never permit him to leave the island alive, much less regain his normal stature.

Russell sat on, with dull horror and hopelessness gnawing his mind, unheedful of the moonlight that was brilliant now in the laboratory. It picked out things here and there, the flange of the microscope, the handle of a tool, the pans of the balance—and made them shine dazzlingly. To his ears there came no sound from outside, and Russell was only aware of how deep was the silence in the laboratory, when it was broken finally by a sound.

It was an odd scratching sound from the laboratory's floor, beneath the shadow of one of the tables. Russell listened intently.

The sound came again, stopped and he heard light, hesitant footsteps. He rose and sprang silently to the wall of his glass cell, gazing into the laboratory. At first he saw nothing unusual; then his eye caught a movement and he saw that from the shadow of the great table opposite were carefully advancing two figures. They were men, two pigmy men of the same foot high stature as himself!

They were quite visible in the bright moonlight, gazing cautiously around. Both were dressed in rough, tunic-like garments not unlike his own, and both carried what seemed long metal-pointed spears. They halted, and Russell saw them gazing upwards towards his glass prison. He almost uttered a shout but changed it in time to a loud hiss. At the sibilant call, the two waved quickly, as though glimpsing him, and then were running away beneath him, along the laboratory floor and out of sight.

Russell's heart was pounding. Had the two fled! For a moment in which his heart sank, he thought so; then he saw them again.

Far along his great table a chair stood close to its edge, and the two were clambering up with some difficulty on to this. Grasping rungs and leg, they pulled themselves up until they were on the chair's seat. Then they were at the harder task of climbing up one of the rungs of the back towards the table's level. Russell saw them toiling upward, the cor-

rugations of the rung helping them, until they were level with the table's top, a few inches from them. They clung to the rung an instant, then leaped.

They struck the table's metal top and collapsed in a heap, but almost at once were up and hastening along the table towards his prison. As they came closer he saw that one was young, his own age, and the other somewhat older, both dark-haired and unshaven men. The spears they carried were in fact slender wooden rods about eight to ten inches in length, to the end of each of which had been bound with fine wire, a small, sharp-pointed nail. These were, for the foot-high men, heavy and formidable weapons.

The two came to the glass wall, peered inside at him. He opened his mouth to call to them but one shook his head warningly. Russell was silent, watching them with pulse throbbing.

They conversed with each other in low whispers, pointing first to the thickness of the glass wall and then toward the heavy screen fastened over the box's top. At last one hurried off along the table, searching for something, while the other began to uncoil a roll of what seemed strong rope rolled round his body. It was in reality a length of ordinary twine. By the time he had it uncoiled and had knotted it here and there the other had returned, a short piece of steel wire in his grasp.

The two grasped it and with a great effort bent it into the form of a hook. In a moment they had tied the twine-rope to it; then the older of the two whirled the shining hook around his head and sent it hurtling upwards. It curved down and fell upon the lattice screen over the glass box, was dragged along it for a moment then suddenly caught in one of the screen's openings. At once the younger of the two was climbing upwards by the knots, the other holding the rope steady beneath.

Russell saw the climber gain the top and inspect quickly the chain-fastening and lock that secured the screen over the glass cell. After a moment he whispered down to the man below. The latter tied one of his spears to the rope and in another instant the one above had it in his hands. He inserted it in one of the screen's openings, pried and levered this way

and that until he had made an opening a few inches across. Russell was watching tensely.

Then the man above drew up the rope from outside and let it fall down through the opening into the glass cell's interior. His whispered order was not needed, for in an instant Russell had grasped the rope and was climbing. He reached the top, balanced beside the other on the glass wall's edge, panting.

'You're Garland's new experiment?' the other was whispering hoarsely. 'You're the man who came yesterday—that Garland used the compound on?'

Russell panted his name. 'And you?'

'I'm Snelling,' the other whispered. 'And that's Lowerman down there. Did you hear us? I thought Garland might have told you when you woke. We saw you come with him yesterday—we did our best to warn you, but couldn't. There are Wallace and Johnson and Hall besides us two. Garland's experiments—pigmies, all of us. The others are waiting for you now.'

Russell struggled for reason. 'But where—?'

'Down beneath the laboratory,' Snelling whispered. 'We have a place there—we use the rat-holes and runways to get about—and Wallace sent us after you—has a plan.'

There was a warning hiss from the waiting figure beneath, and Snelling pulled Russell towards the wall's edge, drew up and let down the rope again upon the other side of the wall. Russell slid down it, the other close after him.

Lowerman hastened to their side, his haggard and unshaven face clear in the moonlight. He grasped Russell's hands.

'We've got to get down to the others at once,' he told him in a tense whisper. 'There's not much time left and we only have till morning.'

'Until morning?' repeated the dazed Russell, and Lowerman nodded swiftly.

'It's Wallace's plan—he'll tell you about it—but we've got to get out of here now. You have the rope, Snelling? Good—there's no time to lose.'

Russell found himself hastening along the long metal surface of table gleaming in the moonlight, with Lowerman and

Snelling on either side of him. It came to his dazed brain to appreciate for a moment the utter grotesqueness of it—that he, a pigmy of twelve inches height, should run with two others like him along the surface of a table! A sensation of unreality held him until they came to the spot where the chair stood beside the table, its back rungs a few inches away.

Lowerman without hesitating, jumped for the nearest or corner rung and grasped it, clinging at the same time to his spear, sliding down to the chair's seat. Russell followed, grasping the rung with all his strength, lowering himself to the seat also. Snelling was but an instant behind him, and already Lowerman was clambering down from the seat to the floor. In another minute they all stood there.

Without hesitating, the other two hurried Russell across the floor, a vast wooden plain to his eyes, and into the lightless shadow beneath the great opposite table. They reached the wall, fumbled along its juncture with the floor, until Lowerman's whisper indicated that he had found what he sought. As Russell's eyes became a little accustomed to the darkness beneath the table he saw that Lowerman and Snelling had brought him to a round, ragged hole that had apparently been gnawed through the wooden strip at the wall's base. It was, in reality, he knew but a few inches across, but it seemed to him that many feet.

Lowerman had already stooped, was wriggling through the hole and disappearing into the still deeper darkness inside. His whisper came out to Russell, but the latter shrank back. Snelling, though, grasped his shoulder.

'It's the only way, Russell. Straight on—we've used these rat-holes for the last two weeks.'

Russell mastered his instinctive terror, stooped and wriggled through it also. He found himself in darkness absolute, and felt in a moment the touch of Lowerman's hands. A scraping sound told him that Snelling was beside them.

There was a loud scratch and splutter and a bright light flamed abruptly beside him. Lowerman held in his hand what seemed to be a short wooden cane burning brightly at one end. It was only when he suddenly remembered his own present pigmy size that Russell recognised the burning cane as an ordinary match.

The flame illuminated the place in which they stood, the interior of the wall. It seemed a narrow long hall whose walls towered up to colossal heights into the darkness above. Lowerman had fumbled for something on the floor, producing finally a crudely shaped and thick little piece of candle. With the great match he lit it, and as its light replaced that of the expiring match he motioned Russell onward. With Lowerman leading, holding the lighted candlepiece, they started along the vast walled narrow corridor that was the wall's interior. Russell fought against his sense of utter unreality as they went forward.

They moved on until Russell estimated that they must be approaching the corner of the wall. He wondered whither Lowerman was leading. He wondered—

‘ Snelling— back! ’

As Lowerman's tense whisper hissed, the three sprang back as though plucked by a great hand. Russell heard from ahead a strange, rushing loping sound, then a confused deep squeaking grunt that froze his blood. Lowerman had thrust the candle-piece into his hands, had sprung forward with Snelling, their spears level! Russell glimpsed one—or was it two?—great dark shapes ahead of them, just beyond the range of the candle's light, saw the gleam of quick eyes; then a swift rush of feet as the things sprang.

There were two of them, twin monstrous shapes that Russell could not recognise as rats despite his brain's assurance. Fully half his own height they towered, with bodies as long as his was high, great fur-clad monsters whose eyes were gleaming and whose open jaws were white-fanged and snarling as they sprang. He felt the impact of their rush, saw Snelling go down and Lowerman knocked to his knees as they thrust at the onrushing beasts with their spears.

One of the huge rats squealed as Lowerman's long nail spearhead sank to its depths into its body. Russell glimpsed Lowerman, braced against the floor, thrusting the spear deeper into the thing as its great furry body flexed and stiffened convulsively against the wall. But Snelling was down beneath the other, the great jaws at his throat. Russell, a madness of combat on him, threw himself forward, thrust the lighted candle in his hand against the beast's side.

There was a sickening smell of burnt hair and flesh instantly and the beast whirled with a squealing snarl upon Russell. He dodged sideways, felt the needle pain of fangs closing on his thigh, then felt those fangs unclosing almost instantly. He staggered up, saw that Snelling and Lowerman were driving their already bloody spears again and again into the second rat's body. As Russell stumbled to his feet the great rat lay still, its paws slowly closing and unclosing. Russell felt Lowerman and Snelling at his side, found himself laughing weakly.

'Fighting with rats in a wall! Fighting death combats with rats inside a wall!'

'Steady Russell!' Lowerman clutched his shoulder. 'We've got to go on—your leg's not hurt bad?'

Russell shook his head weakly. 'It didn't have even a good hold on me. But let's go on, then—for God's sake let's go on.'

'Rather—more bold every day—' Snelling was panting as they hurried forward again. 'Not afraid now of the candle fire, even—almost took Johnson's arm off two days ago—'

'Down here, Russell!' Lowerman directed.

They had come to a gnawed aperture in the wooden bottom of the wall. Lowerman dropped through it, Russell handed down the candle, and then followed with Snelling.

He found himself in another corridor, but one whose walls were of damp earth. It was narrow, and only by stooping could they go forward in it. With Lowerman ahead and Snelling behind again he moved along it. The corridor twisted and turned to right and left, and here and there was crossed by other earth-tunnels. Before coming to each of these crossings they waited, listening, before venturing ahead.

The earthen tunnel twisted onward and at last Lowerman and Snelling turned with him into a branching corridor. This ended abruptly in a blank earth wall in which was a single round opening that seemed a few feet across.

Lowerman extinguished their candle, and as he did so Russell saw that through the opening from beyond came a faint yellow light. They crawled through the opening, and he found himself in a fairly large den hollowed in the earth. It was illuminated by an ordinary candle burning at its centre, one that seemed of enormous size to the pigmy Russell.

Around this candle, less than twice its height, three men awaited them. All were as unshaven and haggard of face as Lowerman and Snelling. One was big and white of hair, older than the others. Another had his shoulder tied in crude cloth bandages. Against the den's walls leaned several of the nail-head spears, some rude couches of cloth and grass, some scraps of food and candle. The smells of damp earth and smoke in the place were almost overpowering.

The white-haired man had grasped Russell's hand. 'I hoped Lowerman and Snelling would bring you,' he was saying quickly. 'We dared not all venture up—Garland's laid so many traps for us—'

Russell dazedly returned the handclasp. 'Then you're—you're—'

'Wallace—Dr. Fairfield Wallace. I am, or was, head of this research station. This is Hall here, and this Johnson—he had a pretty bad time of it with a rat in one of the runways, but he's getting better now.'

They crouched down round the candle. Until he died Russell would not forget that scene—their six pigmy figures around the looming candle whose light flickered across the damp earth walls of the subterranean den and on the drawn faces of his companions. Wallace was leaning tensely toward him.

'Russell, your name is? Russell, we've got little time. Garland is mad. He is a mad genius of science, if there can be such a thing. He worked for years on his gland compounds, his size-changing compounds, until they have become a mania or obsession with him. His great aim was to try the compounds on human beings, and that's why he got us to establish our research station on this isolated island, though we never guessed it at the time. And once here he drugged us and injected the size-decreasing compound into us all just as he drugged you and injected it into you, making pigmies of us as he has of you.'

'We found ourselves pigmies and were in horror of what further fiendish experiments he might carry out on us, so we managed to escape and get down into this maze of rat runways under the laboratory and bungalow. The things

we've seen and done here in these last two weeks! Russell, back home I have a house, a family, a position in the scientific world. And I'm here, hiding from rats and snakes, fighting spiders, hunting bats to kill for food!

'But no more of that. Our one aim in these two weeks has been to get the red size-increasing compound of Garland's that alone can restore us to our normal size. He coloured the two compounds red and green to distinguish between them, and the red one alone can ever bring us back from pigmies to men. And Garland knows that!

'He knows that our one aim is to get the red compound and he has taken care that we shall not do so. The only supply of it is in the tube which he carries with the other compound and his needle in that small black case. That case never leaves his person. And each night Garland has locked himself securely in his bedroom in the bungalow, with the compound case. There's no hope of getting the case from him while he's awake, of course, for in our pigmy size he could kill all of us with a blow. Our one hope is to steal the case while he sleeps.

'In the last week we have been burrowing up through the wall toward his bedroom. We have a runway now leading up from one of the rat tunnels beneath the bungalow to his bedroom wall, and we've only a thin surface of plaster to break through now. So to-night—now—we're going to try it, going to break through into his room and try stealing the case. If Garland discovers us, it means death for us all, of course. But on the other hand only that single tube of red liquid will ever bring us back to normal stature. Are you going to try it with us?'

Russell drew a long breath. His brain seemed spinning. 'I'm with you, of course,' he said at last. 'You're going to try it—now?'

'Now,' Wallace affirmed. 'We've got to make the attempt before Garland wakes, and it will take us some time to get from here over into the bungalow and up inside his room wall.'

They all stood up. Wallace gave quick orders to the others and they began crawling out of the cavity into the corridor

or rat-tunnel outside. Wallace handed to Russell one of the heavy spears with its nail head.

'These wouldn't do us any good against Garland, God knows,' he said, 'but they help us against the rats and others.'

'We go through the rat-tunnels to the bungalow?' Russell asked, but the other shook his head.

'No, just through them to the surface and then over to the bungalow and into its own tunnels. There is a perfect warren of them beneath these two buildings.'

They crawled out after the others and stood in the rat-tunnel with Lowerman and Hall carrying candles, whose flickering light feebly illuminated the earthwalled corridor. At once and without words, they set forth along it, but in an opposite direction from that by which Russell had come. To Russell it was all dream-like by then—the flickering-lit low earth tunnel they followed, their little band of rough-garbed spear-armed men, the desperate venture that took them forward.

The tunnel wound this way and that. Lowerman led with one candle and Hall brought up the rear with the other. Once Snelling jabbed forth his spear to pin to the earth floor a great thing that had been scuttling sideways, a dark many-legged shape that seemed of octopus size to Russell, and that he only recognised after a moment as a big spider. Once, too, as they crossed another tunnel, there writhed in front of them a thick long snake-like thing that they passed unheedingly—a great earth-worm.

The tunnel curved upward, and the going became harder, its roof still so low as to keep them stooping in it. In moments there came to Russell over the fumes of damp earth a breath of cleaner air. He glimpsed a round starlit opening ahead and above.

They were within a few yards of it, seemingly, when it was blocked by a dark shape rushing in from outside. Without a word, Snelling and Wallace and Lowerman had dashed forward with ready spears. There was a grunt and click of jaws, a threshing that dwindled suddenly, and before the dazed Russell could more than realise that another huge rat had rushed into the corridor from outside, the three were beckon-

ing them on, panting and with their spears bloody. Russell followed them sickly over the big still furry body.

The candles were extinguished and they came out into open air. Russell found that they were standing in grass, whose great blades towered above their heads all around them. He made out the dark looming expanse of a gigantic wall behind them, realised that it was the side of the laboratory building up from beneath which they had come. Ahead, just visible above the grass-tops, loomed another wall.

They had halted, and Wallace pointed towards it.

‘The bungalow,’ he whispered to Russell. ‘Go quiet now, Russell—’

They started forward through the grass. It was like forcing through a thicket of huge vegetation, as they struggled onwards through the towering blades. The wall of the bungalow loomed slowly closer as they went on.

They halted once as a giant winged thing that seemed of airplane size went by just above them with a whir of wings. A bat or bird of some kind, Russell knew. He caught himself glancing at the stars as they fought on through the grass, wondering if ever before they had looked down on such a scene as this of their pigmy band and its progress.

There came suddenly from Johnson, at the side of the little band, a low tense whisper, and he pointed to the right with his unbandaged arm. They all froze, motionless, silent.

Russell, heart pounding, saw that to the right and ahead, the towering grass blades were stirred by a nearing commotion, parting this way and that. There was a dry, slithering sound coming nearer. Then he saw what it was that approached. A snake. A huge snake that was to their eyes more than a score of feet in length, between one and two feet in thickness. It was gliding through the great grass slantwise across their path.

The starlight showed clear to Russell as it neared the enormous flexing and unflexing length of the snaky body, the triangular head and great jewel-like eyes. He strove to tell himself that the thing was but an ordinary snake, made monstrous to them by their own pigmy size. He could only watch it with the others as it glided nearer. It did not see them, but glided past and vanished in the tall grass behind

them. Russell was not aware of what horror was shaking him until he felt Wallace's steadying hand on his shoulder. He stumbled on with the others.

The great dark wall of the bungalow was closer, and as they went on through the grass they changed their course, heading toward one of the building's corners. Beneath a thicket of shrubs near that corner they halted. A burrow-like opening in the earth yawned blackly beneath them.

Already Snelling and Lowerman were dropping into it. Russell followed with Wallace, heard the other two coming after them. They were in darkness until a match flared and spluttered to reveal another rat-runway like those beneath the laboratory. The candles were lit and they started along it. To Russell, his brain already dazed, the earth walls around them made it seem that their minutes of progress through the towering grasses in the open air were but a dream-like interlude.

The tunnel twisted upward. They came to a great solid wood barrier over their heads, a round hole gnawed through it. When they had pulled themselves up through it, they stood in the interior of a wall, a narrow and towering-walled corridor like that other laboratory wall through whose interior Russell had come through. The little band went along this and then after a few moments turned into another narrow wall-corridor opening at right angles from the one they followed. They clambered over obstructions until they came to a place where wood and plaster alike had been hacked out and a tiny hole pierced through the thin surface of plaster remaining on the wall's other side. At once the candles were extinguished.

Wallace drew their heads close. 'This is Garland's room,' he whispered. 'We've worked for days to dig through this wall, Russell. Don't make a sound now until we have a look.'

He turned back to the tiny opening in the plaster and peered through it. He motioned then to Russell.

'He's asleep all right,' he whispered, 'and the case—look.'

Russell peered through the opening. He saw a room like that which he had occupied in the bungalow on the preceding night—centuries before, it seemed—dimly lit by the thin starlight from the window, with a few chests and articles

of furniture and a simple cot. On the cot stretched an unmoving figure, breathing regularly in sleep—the figure of Garland, gigantic to his eyes. And on a low table beside the cot—his heart bounded—the black case that held the two compounds!

‘We’ll try it now,’ Wallace whispered. ‘If we can steal that case and get away before he wakes . . .’

‘Enlarge the opening now?’ Snelling asked, his spear poised.

Wallace nodded. ‘But quietly, for God’s sake!’

Snelling and Hall began to dig silently at the plaster around the opening, chipping it away with their heavy spears. It seemed iron-hard, but bit by bit they broke loose little fragments of it, enlarging the opening. Once a fragment fell outside and rattled on the room’s floor, a foot or two behind the opening. They all were silent and unmoving, but the regular loud breathing of Garland continued.

At last they had chipped away an opening large enough to permit their passage through it. Snelling went first, sliding down to the floor with spear in hand and catching and steadying the others as they too descended. Johnson was last, half-falling. They stood upon the floor, a group of six pigmy figures, but a third of the height of the great wooden chest that loomed beside them.

They started silently across the room toward the low, bedside table. Russell, his breathing strangely tight, found himself carrying his spear poised, his eyes on the sleeping, huge figure in the cot. The absurdity of it came home to him—the thought that with the tiny ten-inch spear he could kill that enormous figure. But they were almost beneath the low table now—his heart drumming with excitement—the eyes of the others brilliant with hope—the table—the case—the case—

A cry from Snelling, and they leaped back, but too late! The huge, motionless form of Garland on the cot had sprung into sudden activity, had leapt to the wall and with a single shove of his giant arm had pushed the great chest against the wall, covering the hole by which they had entered, blocking their retreat. Garland’s hand found the switch and far overhead in the ceiling flared the sunlike lamps, flooding the

room with light. And Garland, a forty-foot giant to their eyes, confronted the six pigmy figures, fully dressed, a gleaming pistol in his hand!

His laugh rumbled down to them like thunder. 'So you came at last,' he jeered. 'Wallace—Lowerman—all of you—and even you, too, Russell, escaped I see. I knew you would come—sooner or later!

'You thought your burrowing through the wall quite unobserved, eh? You dolts! You might have known that I was quite aware of it, and only let you go on because I knew that you would be coming in here to steal the compounds and that I need only wait to trap you here!

'And trapped you are—trapped like rats to die the death of rats! Do you remember how we used to shoot at the rats with our pistols when we first came here? Well, the next few minutes ought to be just as amusing, with you six taking the place of the rats. I can get other and more tractable subjects for my experiments, I think. And as for you six, you can now—' his arm came up with the pistol.

Wallace cried to the others as their tiny pigmy figures sprang back beneath the table's shadow. 'Snelling—Hall—get to his ankles—try to trip him—our only chance—'

Snelling and Hall sprang beneath the shadow of the immense cot just as there came a terrific detonation across the great room, and a smashing and splintering of the floor beside them as the great bullet crashed into it. The gigantic Garland, laughing in crazy amusement, and not noticing the running two figures beneath the cot, sent another bullet into the floor in front of them as they leapt to escape the first. Russell saw Johnson trip as they recoiled again beneath the table, and dragged him with him an instant before another great bullet dug the floor at that spot.

The scene was fantastic, out of nightmare! The vast room, the colossal shape of Garland with pistol in hand, the massive leaden missiles that crashed at them. They made for the shelter of the cot, but threw themselves back only in time to escape another bullet which sent clouds of great splinters over them. Lowerman, struck by a flying splinter, was knocked flat, and Russell saw Garland's giant arm train the pistol on him. But he saw, too, the foot-high figures of Snelling and

Hall racing out from the shadow beside Garland to stab furiously at his ankles with their spears! Garland stumbled, his fifth shot going wild. He started to whirl round to stamp upon the two pigmy figures beneath him, but they had gripped his ankles and he tripped, fell, his body across the room with head near the other four pigmy men, pistol flying from his grasp as he struck the floor.

Instantly the four foot-high men were upon him, clambering towards his throat with spears fiercely out-thrust. The battle of Gulliver and the Lilliputians re-enacted, it flashed through Russell's brain as he drove forward with his spear. But Garland, a vast bellow of rage coming from him, was scrambling up, his flailing enormous arms knocking them this way and that. Russell felt himself whirling across the floor as a flailing arm struck him, saw Garland rising to his feet, his face crimson with rage. And Garland, his crazy amusement dissolved into mad fury now, was grasping a chair, whirling it over his head to send it crashing down on the scattered pigmy figures.

Russell, staggering to his feet even as Garland's chair swung up, felt rather than saw beside him a big metal shape, the pistol that had slid from Garland's hand as the giant fell. To the foot-high Russell the pistol was huge, but almost without conscious exertion he had grasped and lifted it, one arm encircling its great butt and his other hand on the trigger as he pointed it up like some clumsy big rifle toward the giant Garland's chest. He was not aware that he had pulled the trigger until the roar of the weapon knocked him backward. There was silence . . .

Garland swayed as though in stupid surprise, the huge chair slipping from his upraised hands and crashing to the floor—swayed, a spreading red stain upon his breast, until he too slumped and crashed in thunderous fall to the floor.

Russell was dazedly aware of voices and running feet, of the others crowding about him, weeping, sobbing, helping him up. Wallace and Lowerman were climbing to the low table, bearing down from it the black case between them, the six pigmy figures crowding round it as it was opened with frantic haste. The tubes of red and green compound—Wallace was filling the big hypodermic needle, the others supporting

tube and needle as the red compound filled the latter. The crouched down near the room's centre but away from the prostrate giant figure of Garland—and then Wallace and the great needle—a stab of pain in Russell's neck as it penetrated—and then swift darkness—darkness—darkness . . .

When Russell awoke, sunlight was warm upon his face. He opened his eyes, stirred, sat weakly up, nausea and weariness infinite upon him. Around him others were stirring. He looked about him dazedly then with swift remembrance and comprehension. Wallace and Lowerman and Snelling, Johnson and Hall, they all were stirring, waking like himself in the crowded room that seemed now not gigantic, but small. And beside them another figure that did not stir—Garland! Garland—his dead figure no larger in size than their own!

They staggered to their feet, all dazed by the transition from pigmy to human being once more. They were all without clothing, and on the floor lay the little rough tunics that had been theirs as pigmies, and the absurdly little spears. They groped out of the room after unlocking the door and groped into clothing from the other rooms, like men restored suddenly from insanity to sanity. They poured stumbling out of the bungalow into the light of still another sunset, their speech still incoherent.

'The boat!' said Wallace thickly. 'Let's get away—for God's sake let's get away!' He halted suddenly. 'But first—'

He ran back into the bungalow, and when he emerged disappeared into the laboratory and then joined them. As they stumbled away from the buildings and down towards the island's shore, thin curls of smoke lifted from the two structures. They reached the shore of the island, opposite that where Russell had first landed, and there was the long boat-house with still upon its door the lock that Garland had placed there. They smashed into it and in a few moments had the cabin-boat out and heading with noisy motor away from the island.

Clouds of dark smoke were lifting skyward from the island's higher centre as the flames ate the two buildings there. The sunset's level rays struck in vain against their black and billowing masses. Snelling held the boat westward away from the island, Lowerman and Hall and Johnson sprawled in its

cockpit. Wallace pointed back with unsteady hand to the lifting smoke-clouds as he and Russell gazed.

‘There never were any of Garland’s compounds—never any pigmies that he made with them from men,’ he said. ‘Never anything but an accidental fire that caught Garland. You understand?’

Russell nodded weakly. ‘Better so,’ he whispered. ‘Better that the world hear it so.’

He crouched with Wallace, looking back still. The island was dropping behind, vanishing in the waters, but the smoke from it rose visible still into the heavens like a great black column, an enormous sign. Their eyes could mark it still, though the island itself had passed from sight. Snelling, though, had not turned, had not looked, heading the boat straight onward into the setting sun.

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